

Divine Conduct: OR, THE MYSTERY OF Providence.

WHEREIN

The *Being* and *Efficacy* of *Providence* is
Asserted and Vindicated: The *Methods* of
Providence, as it passes through the several *Stages*
of our *Lives*, opened: And the proper *Course*
of improving all *Providences* directed to, in
a Treatise upon *Psalms* 57. 2. R. Flavel (John)

By *John Flavel*, Preacher of the Gospel.

*Totam Dei Providentiam omnia tandem dirigere ad gloriam
suam, & ad Electorum salutem; ac tum quiescere Spiritum
Dei, cum videt Impios damnari, ac Electos servari;
ex qua utraque re Deus glorificetur. Hieron. Zanchii
Miscell. Tom. 2. pag. 199.*

*Psal. III. 4. יָכַר עֲשָׂה לְנַפְלָאֲתָיו memoriam fecit
mirabilium suorum.*

L O N D O N:

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THE
MUSEUM
OF
PROVINCES



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To the RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM
Duke of *BEDFORD*,
Lord RUSSEL of *Thornehaugh*,
And Knight of the Most Noble
ORDER of the GARTER.

My LORD,

IT was a weighty and savoury Speech, which
a Pious Pen once saved from your Lordship's
Lips, viz. That *You accounted the Prayers of Mr. Isaac*
God's Ministers and People the best Walls about your Ambrose
House. He that so accounts, doubtless under-*Epist. to*
stands, that Prayer engageth Providence, *Isa. 45. ma.*
1. And Providence so engaged, is the surest
munition, *Job 1. 10.*

Many great Men enclose their Dwellings with
a high Wall, but the Foundation (as the Wisest
Men observes) is laid in their own Conceits,
Prov. 18. 11. Yea, in Sin, and crying Sin too,
Job. 2. 12. Of such Walls we may say, as the

The Epistle Dedicatory.

Oracle to Phocas, ἐὰν ὑψοῖς τὰ τεῖχῃ ἕως ἡγεγνῆ ἔνδον τὸ κακόν. If the Building emulate the Skies, yet Sin being in the Bottom, all will Totter.

'Tis a fond Vanity, to think of ensuring a Destiny that can control the Stars, and endure the assaults of Fortune, (as they love to speak) whilst Providence is not engaged for them, no not so much as by a bare Acknowledgment.

My Lord, It is not the vast Bulk of an Estate, nor the best human Security in the World, but the vigilant Care of Divine Providence, that guards both It, and its Owners from the Stroke of Ruin. 'Tis the Fear of God within us, and the Providence of God round about us, which make the firm and solid Basis of all sanctified and durable Prosperity. It is beyond all Debate, that there is a Providence of God always enfold- ing those in everlasting Arms, that bear his Image. The Impress of that Image upon you, and the Embraces of those Arms about you, will advance you higher, and secure you better, than your Noble Birth or Estate could ever do.

My Lord, Providence hath molded you *è meliori luto*, made you both the Offspring and Head of an Illustrious Family, planted you in a rich and pleasant Soil, caused many Noble Branches to spring from you, drawn your Life even unto Old Age, through the Delights and Honours of this World. And now that you have tried all those Things that make the fairest Pretensions to Happiness: What have you found in all these painted Beauties, and false glossing Excellencies which have successively courted you? Which of them all can you pronounce Self-desirable? Which can you call *objectum par amori*? What is it to have the Flesh indulged, Sense gratified, Fancy tickled, What

The Epistle Dedicatory.

What have you found in Meats and Drinks, in stately Houses and pleasant Gardens; in Gold and Silver, in Honour and Applause, to match the Appetite of your Nobler Soul? Surely (*My Lord*) to turn from them all with a generous Disdain, as one that knows where to find better Entertainment; is much more *Noble*, than wholly to immerse, and lose our Spirits in those sensual Fruitions, as many do, alas, too many in our days!

We are fallen into the dregs of Time, *Sensuality* runs every where into *Atheism*. *Providentia peperit divitias, sed filia devoravit matrem*. The Largesses of Providence have so blinded, and perfectly stupified the Minds of some, that they neither own a Providence, nor a God, who do *σαρκοποιεῖν τὸν ἀνθρώπον ὅλον, καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ταῖς τῷ σώματι ἡδοναῖς καλᾶσυσβῶλειν*, as *Plutarch* both wittily and judiciously reply'd upon *Colotes the Epicurean*.

But blessed be God, there is a sincere part, both of the *Nobles* and *Commons* of *England*, which this Gangrene hath not yet touched, and I hope never shall.

My Lord, It is both your Honour and Interest to be *ὅλως τῷ κρείττονος*, the entire and devored Servant of Providence. It was once the Wish of a good Man, *Optarem id me esse Deo, quod est mihi manus mea*. This is the most Noble and Divine Life that can be, to live and act in this World upon Eternal Designs. To look upon our selves and what we have, as things devoted to God; not to be content that Providence should serve it self of us (for so it doth even of those things which understand nothing of it) but to study wherein we may serve Providence, and be instrumental in its Hand for the good of many;

The Epistle Dedicatory.

this is truly Honourable; *Quo magis quis Deo vivit, eo evadit nobilior, clarior, diviniior.*

How much God hath honoured you in this respect, the World will understand better, when your Lordship shall be gathered to your Fathers, and sleep in the Dust, then he that praiseth cannot be suspected of Flattery; nor he that is praised, be moved with Vain-glory: But the Approbation of God is infinitely better than the most glorious Name among Men, before or after Death.

And as it is most *honourable* to *serve*, so you will find it most comfortable to *observe* the Ways of God in his Providence: To compose our selves to think of the *Conduct of Providence* through all the *Stages of Life* we have hitherto passed: To note the Results of its profound Wisdom, the Effects of its tender Care, the distinguishing Fruits of its special Bounty: To mark how Providences have gone along step by step with the Promises, and both with us, till they have now brought us near to our Everlasting Rest: Oh how delectable! how transporting are such Meditations as these!

My Lord, It is the Design of this *Manual*, to assert the *Being* and *Efficacy* of Providence against the *Atheism* of the Times; and to display the Wisdom and Care of the Providence of God in all the Concerns of that People who are really his. 'Tis probable, if your Lordship will stoop to such a vulgar Composure, somewhat may occur of a grateful Relish to your pious Mind. I confess, it is not accommodated, either in Exactness of Method, or Elegancy of Style, to gratify the Curious; nor yet is it destitute of what may please and profit the truly gracious.

Should

The Epistle Dedicatory.

Should I here recite the Pleasure and Advantages resulting from an humble and heedful eying of the Methods of Providence, it would look more like a *Book* in an *Epistle*, than an *Epistle* in a *Book*. One Taste of spiritual Sense will satisfy you better than all the accurate Descriptions and high *Encomiums* that the most elegant Pen can bestow upon it.

My Lord, It is not that eminent Station that some Persons retain (in Civil respects) above the Vulgar, that will enable them to penetrate the Mysteries, and relish the Sweetness of Providence better than others ; (for doubtless many that live immediately upon Providence for daily Bread, do thereby gain a nearer acquaintance with it, than those, whose outward Enjoyments flow to them in a more plentiful and stated Course) but those that excel in Grace and Experience, those that walk and converse with God in his Dispensations towards them ; these are the Persons who are most fully and immediately capable of these high Pleasures of the Christian Life. The daily Flow and Increase whereof in your Lordship's Noble Person and Family, is the hearty Desire of,

Your Lordship's most Humble Servant,

*From my Study
at Dartmouth,
Aug. 10. 1677.*

John Flavel.

T O T H E

Ingenious Readers,

Those especially, who are the heed-
ful Observers of the Ways of PRO-
VIDENCE,

READER,

THERE are two Ways whereby the Blessed God con-
descends to manifest Himself to Men, His Word,
and his Works. Of the written Word we must
say, No Words like these were ever written since the begin-
ning of Time, which can (as one speaks) take Life and
Root in the Soul, yea, doth it as really as the Seed doth in
the Ground: And are fitted to be engrafted and naturali-
zed there, so as no Coalition in Nature can be more real
than this, James 1. 21: This is the most transcendent
and glorious Medium of Manifestation; God hath mag-
nified his Word above all his Name, Psalm 138. 2.

However, the Manifestations of God by his Works,
whether of Creation or Providence, have their Value and
Glory: But the prime Glory and Excellency of his Provi-
dential Works consists in this, that they are the very Ful-
fillings and real Accomplishments of his written Word.
By a wise and heedful Attendance hereunto, we might learn
that excellent Art, which is (not unsuly) called by some
Scientia Architectonica, an Art to clear the Mysterious
Occurrences of Providence, by reducing them to the writ-
ten Word, and there lodge them as Effects in their proper
Causes. And doubtless, this is one of the rarest Essays
Men could pursue against Atheism, to shew, not only how
Provi-

The Epistle to the Reader.

Providences concur in a most obvious tendency to confirm this great Conclusion, Thy Word is Truth; but how it sometimes extorts also the Confession of a God, and the Truth of his Word, from those very Tongues which have boldly denied it. *Æschyles* the Persian relating their Dis- *Æschiles* comfiture by the Grecian Army, makes this notable Ob- in Tra-
servation, "When the Grecian Forces hotly pursued us, good.

"(saith he) and we must needs venture over the great
"Water Strymon, then frozen, but beginning to thaw;
"when a hundred to one we had all dyed for it, with mine
"Eyes I then saw many of those Gallants whom I had
"heard so boldly maintain, there was no God, every one
"upon their Knees, with Eyes and Hands lifted up, beg-
"ging hard for Help and Mercy, and entreating that the
"Ice might hold till they got over. Many thousand Seals
hath Providence forced the very Enemies of God to set to his
Truths, which greatly tends to our Confirmation therein;
but especially, to see how the Word and Providence of God
do enlighten each other; and how the Scriptures contain
all those Events, both great and small, which are disposed
by Providence in their Seasons: And how not only the Pro-
mises of the Word are in the general faithfully fulfilled to
the Church in all her Exigencies and Distresses; but in
particular to every Member of it; they being all furnished
by Providence with Multitudes of Experiences to this Use
and End. O how useful are such Observations!

And as the Profit and Use, so the Delight and Pleasure
resulting from the Observations of Providence, is exceed-
ing great. It will doubtless be a part of our Entertain-
ment in Heaven, to view with transporting Delight, how
the Designs and Methods were laid to bring us thither:
And what will be a part of our Blessedness in Heaven, may
well be allowed to have a prime Ingrediency into our Heaven
upon Earth. To search for Pleasure among the due Obser-
vations of Providence, is to search for Water in the Ocean:
For Providence doth not only ultimately design to bring
you to Heaven, but (as intermediate thereunto) to bring
(by this means) much of Heaven into your Souls in the way
thither.

How great a Pleasure is it to discern how the most Wise
God is providentially steering all to the Port of his own
Praise,

The Epistle to the Reader.

Praise, and his Peoples Happiness, whilst the whole World is busily employed in managing the Sails, and tugging the Oars, with a quite opposite Design and Purpose? To see how they promote his Design by opposing it, and fulfil his Will by resisting it, enlarge his Church by scattering it, and make their Rest to come the more sweet to their Souls, by making their Condition so restless in the World. This is pleasant to observe in general: But to record and note its particular Designs upon our selves; with what profound Wisdom, infinite Tenderness, and incessant Vigilancy it hath managed all that concerns us from first to last, is ravishing and transporting.

O what an History might we compile of our own Experiences, whilst with a melting Heart we trace the Footsteps of Providence all along the way it hath led us to this Day; and set our Remarks upon its more eminent Performances for us, in the several Stages of our Life!

Here it Prevented, and there it Delivered: Here it Directed, and there it Corrected: In this it Grieved, and in that it Relieved. Here was the Poison, and there the Antidote. This Providence raised a dismal Cloud, and that dispelled it again: This straitned, and that enlarged: Here a Want, and there a Supply: This Relation withered, and that springing up in its room. Words cannot express the high Delights and Gratifications a gracious Heart may find in such Employments as this.

O what a World of Rarities are to be found in Providence! The blind heedless World makes nothing of them: They cannot find one sweet Bit, where a gracious Soul would make a rich Feast. Plutarch relates very exactly, how Timoleon was miraculously delivered from the Conspiracy of two Murderers, by their meeting in the very nick of Time a certain Person, who to revenge the Death of his Father, killed one of them, just as they were ready to give Timoleon the fatal Blow, tho' he knew nothing of the Business, and so Timoleon escaped the Danger. And what did this wonderful Work of Providence, think you, yield the Relator? Why, tho' he was one of the most learned and ingenious among the Heathen Sages; yet all he made of it was only this, The Spectators (saith he) wondered greatly at the Artifice and Contrivance which

The Epistle to the Reader.

which Fortune uses. This is all he could see in it. Had a spiritual and wise Christian had the Dissecting and Anatomizing of such a Work of Providence, what Glory would it have yielded to God! What Comfort and Encouragement to the Soul; The Bee makes a sweeter Mea^l upon one single Flower; than the Ox doth upon the whole Meadow, where thousands of them grow.

O Reader, if thy Heart be spiritual, and well stock'd with Experience, if thou hast recorded the Ways of Providence towards thee, and wilt but allow thy self Time to reflect upon them; what a Life of Pleasure may'st thou live! What an Heaven upon Earth doth this way lead thee into! I will not here tell thee, what I have met in this Path, lest it should seem to savour of too much Vanity; non est religio ubi omnia patent. There are some Delights and Enjoyments in the Christian Life, which are and must be enclosed. But try it thy self, Taste and See, and thou wilt need no other Inducement; thine own Experience will be the most powerful Oratory to perswade thee to the study and search of Providence.

Histories are usually read with delight: When once the Fancy is caught, a Man knows not how to disengage himself from it. I am greatly mistaken, if the History of our own Lives, if it were well drawn up, and distinctly perused, would not be the pleasantest History that ever we read in our Lives.

The ensuing Treatise is an Essay to that purpose, in which thou wilt find some Remarks set upon Providence, in its passage through the several Stages of our Life. But, Reader, thou only art able to compile the History of Providence for thy self, because the Memorials that furnish it, are only in thine own Hands. However, here thou may'st find a Pattern, and general Rules to direct thee in that great and difficult Work, which is the very End and Design of this Manual.

I have not had much regard to the Dress and Ornament in which this Discourse is to go abroad, for I am Debtor both to the Strong and Weak, Wise and Foolish: And in all my Observation I have not found, that ever God hath made much use of labour'd Periods, Rhetorical Flowers, and Elegancies to improve the Power of Religion in
the

The Epistle to the Reader.

the World. Yea, I have observed how Providence hath sometimes rebuked good Men, when upon other Subjects they have too much affected those pedantick Fooleries in withdrawing from them its usual Aids, and exposing them to shame; and much more may it do so, when it is the Subject.

Reader, if thy stomach be nice and squeasie, and nothing will relish with thee, but what is spruce and elegant, there are store of such Composures in the World, upon which thou may'st even surfeit thy curious Fancy: Mean time there will be found some that will bless God for what thou despisest, and make many a sweet Meal upon what thou loathest.

I will add no more, but my hearty Prayers that Providence will direct this Treatise to such Hands, in such seasons, and so bless and prosper its Design, that God may have Glory, thou may'st have Benefit, and my self Comfort in the Success thereof, who am,

Thine and the Churches Servant in
the Hand of Providence,

John Flavel.

Divine

Divine Conduct,
OR THE
MYSTERY
OF
Providence:

Opened in a
TREATISE

Upon PSALM LVII. 2.

*I will cry unto God most high, unto God that
performeth all things for me.*

THE Greatness of God is a glorious,
and unsearchable Mystery. *The Lord
most high is terrible; he is a great King
over all the Earth, Psal. 47. 2.* The
Condescension of the most high God to Men is
also a profound Mystery. *Though the Lord be
high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly, Psal. 138. 6.*
But when both these meet together (as they do
in this Scripture) they make up a matchless My-
stery. Here we find the most High God per-
forming all things for a poor distressed Creature.
It

Divine Conduct: Or,

It is the great Support and Solace of the Saints in all the Distresses that befall them here, that there is a Wise Spirit sitting in all the Wheels of Motion, and governing the most excentrical Creatures and their most pernicious Designs to blessed and happy Issues. And indeed it were not worth while to live in a World *κενὸν Θεῷ καὶ προνοίᾳ* devoid of God and Providence.

How deeply we are concerned in this Matter, will appear by that great Instance, which this *Psalms* presents us with.

It was composed (as the third Title notes) by *David* Prayer-wise, when he hid himself from *Saul* in the Cave: And is inscribed with a double Title, *Altaschith Michtam of David*. *Altaschith* refers to the Scope, and *Michtam* to the Dignity of the Subject Matter.

The former signifies *destroy not*, or let there be *Altaschith* no Slaughter, and may either refer to *Saul*, concerning whom he gave charge to his Servants not to destroy him; or rather, it hath reference to God, to whom in this great Exigence he poured out his Soul in this pathetical Ejaculation, *David, qui Altaschith destroy not*.

ne perdas scil. vel 1. Saulem; repressit enim suos David, qui incitabant ipsum ut Saulem perderet; vel 2. me & Deus. Geirus in loc. Michtam ornamentum aureum vel aureolum carmen à כתר (i. e.) aurum optimum; quia Psalmus hic preciosus est instar auri. Burgensis.

The latter Title *Michtam* signifies a golden Ornament, and so is suited to the choice and excellent Matter of the *Psalms*, which much more deserves such a Title, than *Pythagoras* his golden Verses did.

Three things are remarkable in the former part of the *Psalms*, viz. (1.) His extream danger. (2.) His earnest Address to God in that Extremity.

The Mystery of Providence.

3

mity. (3.) The Arguments he pleads with God in that Address.

1. His extream danger, expressed both in the Title, and Body of the *Psalms*. The Title tells us, this *Psalms* was composed by him when he hid himself from *Saul* in the Cave. This Cave was in the Wilderness of *Engedi* among the broken Rocks where the wild Goats inhabited, an obscure and desolate Hole; yet even thither the Envy of *Saul* pursued him, 1 *Sam.* 24. 1, 2. And now he that had been so long hunted as a Partridge upon the Mountains seems to be enclosed in the Net; for the Place was begirt with his Enemies, and having in this Place no out-let another way, and *Saul* himself entering into the Mouth of this Cave, in the Sides and Creeks whereof he and his Men lay hid, and saw him, judge to how great an Extremity, and to what a desperate state things were now brought: Well might he say, as it is, v. 4. *My Soul is among Lions, and I lie even among them that are set on fire.* What Hope now remained? What but immediate Destruction could be expected?

Cum autem locum in quo latebat cinctum esse ab exercitu Saulis videret, nec jam ullum effugium parceret quod antea semper in similibus periculis fecerat: nunc quoque ad deum confugit, in loc.

2. Yet this frights him not out of his Faith and Duty, but betwixt the Jaws of Death he prays, and earnestly addresses himself to God for Mercy, v. 1. *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful unto me.* This excellent *Psalms* was composed by him, when there was enough to *discompose* the best Man in the World. The Repetition notes both the Extremity of the Danger, and the Ardency of the Supplicant. Mercy, Mercy! Nothing but Mercy, and that exerting it self in an extraordinary way, can now save him from Ruin.

3. The Arguments he pleads for obtaining Mercy in this distress, are very considerable.

(1.) He pleads his Reliance upon God, as an Ar-

Argument to move Mercy. *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful unto me, for my Soul trusteth in thee; yea in the Shadow of thy Wings will I make my Refuge, until these Calamities be overpast, v. 1.* This his trust and dependance on God, though it be not Argumentative in respect of the dignity of the Act; yet it is so in respect, both of the nature of the Object, a compassionate God, who will not expose any that take shelter under his Wings; and in respect of the Promise, whereby Protection is assured to them that fly to him for Sanctuary, *Isa. 26. 3. Thou wilt keep him in perfect Peace, whose Mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.* Thus he encourages himself from the Consideration of that God to whom he betakes himself.

(2.) He pleads former Experiences of his help in past distresses, as an Argument encouraging hope under the present strait, *ro. 2: I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me.*

In which Words I shall consider Two Things,

1. The Duty resolved upon.

2. The Encouragement to that Resolution.

1. The Duty resolved upon; *I will cry unto God.*

Crying unto God is an Expression that doth not only denote Prayer, but intense and fervent Prayer. To cry, is to pray in an holy Passion; and such are usually speeding Prayers, *Psalms 18. 6. and Heb. 5. 7.*

2. The Encouragements to this Resolution, and these are Twofold.

1. Objective, taken from the Sovereignty of God.

2. Subjective, taken from the Experience he had of his Providence.

1. The

The Mystery of Providence.

5

1. The Sovereignty of God, *I will cry unto God most high.* Upon this he acts his Faith in Extremity of danger. *Saul* is high, but God the most high; and without his Permission, he is assured *Saul* cannot touch him. He had none to help, and if he had, he knew God must first help the Helpers, or they cannot help him. He had no means of defence or escape before him, but the most High is not limited by means. This is a singular Prop to Faith, *Psalms 59. 9.*

2. The Experience of his Providence hitherto : *Unto God that performeth all Things for me.*

The word which we translate [*performeth*] comes from a Root, that signifies both to *perfect*, and to *desist* or *cease*. For when a Business is performed and perfected, the Agent then ceases and desists from working: he puts to the last hand, when he finishes the Work. To such an happy Issue the Lord hath brought all his doubtful and difficult Matters before; and this gives him Encouragement, that he will still be gracious, and perfect that which concerneth him now, as he speaks, *Psal. 138. 8.* *The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.*

The Septuagint renders it by *τὸν ἐνεργηθέντά με* who *profiteth* or *benefiteth* me. And it is a certain Truth, that all the Results and Issues of Providence are profitable and beneficial to the Saints. But the Supplement in our Translation well receives the Importance of the Place, *Who performeth all things.* And it involves the most strict and proper Notion of Providence, which is nothing else but the Performance of God's gracious Purposes, and Promises to his People. And therefore *Vatablus* and *Muis* supply and fill up the Room which the Conciseness of the Original leaves, with *quæ promisit*, *I will cry unto God most High, unto God that performeth*

Divine Conduct : Or,

eth the Things which he hath promised. Payment is the Performance of Promises. Grace makes the Promise, and Providence the Payment.

Piscator fills it with *benignitatem & misericordiam suam*, unto God that performeth his Kindness and Mercy. But still it supposes the Mercy performed, to be contained in the Promise. Mercy is sweet in the Promise, and much more so in the Providential Performance of it to us.

Castalio's Supplement comes nearer to ours, *rerum mearum Transactorem*, I will cry unto God most high, unto God the Transactor of my Affairs.

But our *English* making out the Sense by an universal Particle, is most fully agreeable to the Scope of the Text. For it cannot but be a great Encouragement to his Faith, that God had transacted all things, or performed all things for him; this Providence that never failed him in any of the Straits that ever he met with (and his Life was a Life of many Straits) he might well hope it would not now fail him, though this were an extraordinary and matchless one.

Bring we then our thoughts a little closer to this Scripture, and it will give us a fair and lovely Prospect of Providence.

In its 1. Universal. 2. Effectual. 3. Beneficial. 4. Encouraging Influence upon the Affairs and Concerns of the Saints.

1. The Expression imports the universal Interest and Influence of Providence in and upon all the Concerns and Interests of the Saints. It hath not only its hand in this or that, but in all that concerns them. It hath its Eye upon every thing that relates to them throughout their Lives, from first to last. Not only great, and more important, but the most minute and ordinary Affairs of our Lives are transacted

The Mystery of Providence.

7

acted and managed by it. It touches all things that touch us, whether more nearly or remotely.

2. It displays the *Efficacy of Providential Influences*. Providence doth not only undertake, but [performeth] and perfects what concerns us. It goes through with its designs, and accomplisheth what it begins. No difficulty so clogs it, no cross accident falls in its way, but it carries its design through it. Its Motions are irresistible and uncontrollable, he performs it for us.

3. And (which is sweet to consider) all its Products and Issues are exceeding *beneficial* to the Saints. It performs all things [for them.] 'Tis true, we often prejudge its works, and unjustly censure its designs, and under many of our straits and troubles we say, *all these things are against us*: But indeed Providence neither doth, nor can do any thing that is really against the true Interest and good of the Saints. For what are the Works of Providence, but the Execution of God's Decree, and the fulfilling of his Word? And there can be no more in Providence, than is in them. Now there is nothing but *good* to the Saints in God's Purposes and Promises; and therefore, whatever Providence doth in their Concernments, it must be (as the Text speaks) *the Performance of all things for them*.

4. And if so, how chearing, *supporting*, and *encouraging* must the Consideration of these things be in a day of distress and trouble? What Life and Hope will it inspire our Hearts and Prayers withal, when great pressures lie upon us? It had such a chearing influence upon the *Psalmist* at this time, when the state of his Affairs was to the eye of sense and reason forlorn, and desperate: There was now but an hairs breadth (as we say) betwixt him and ruin.

A potent, enraged, and implacable Enemy had

driven him into the hole of a Rock, and was come after him into that hole, yet now whilst *his Soul is among Lions*, whilst he lies in a cranny of the Rock, expecting every moment to be drawn out to death, the Reflections he had upon the gracious Performances of the most High for him, from the beginning to that moment, support his Soul, and inspire Hope and Life into his Prayers, *I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me.*

The amount of all you have in this doctrinal Conclusion.

Doct. *That it is the Duty of the Saints, especially in Times of straits, to reflect upon the Performances of Providences for them in all the States, and through all the Stages of their Lives.*

The Church in all the works of Mercy, owns the hand of God, Isa. 26. 12. *Lord, thou hast wrought all our Works in (or for) us.* And still it hath been the pious, and constant Practice of the Saints in all Generations, to preserve the memory of the more famous, and remarkable *Providences* that have befallen them in their Times, as a precious Treasure. *If thou be a Christian indeed, I know thou hast, if not in thy Book, yet certainly in thy Heart a great many precious Favours upon Record; the very remembrance and rehearsal of them is sweet: How much more sweet was the actual enjoyment? Baxter's Saints Rest, p. 768.* Thus Moses by divine direction wrote a memorial of that Victory obtained over *Amalek* as the fruit and return of Prayer, and built there an Altar with this Inscription, *Jehovah Nissi, The Lord my Banner*, Exod. 17. 14, 15. Thus *Mordecai* and *Hester* took all care to perpetuate the memory of that signal deliverance from the Plot of *Haman*, by ordaining the Feast of *Purim*, as an *Anniversary* throughout every

every Generation, every Family, every Province, and every City, that those days of *Purim* should not fail from among the Jews, nor the Memorial of them perish from their Seed, *Esth.* 9. 28. For this end you find *Psalms* indited, to bring to remembrance, *Psal.* 70. the Title. Parents give suitable Names to their Children, that every time they looked upon them, they might refresh the Memory of God's Mercies, *1 Sam.* 1. 20. The very places where eminent Providences have appeared, new named, upon no other Design, but to perpetuate the Memorial of those sweet Providences which so refreshed them there: Thence *Bethel* took its Name, *Gen.* 28. 19. And that Well of Water where *Hagar* was seasonably refreshed by the Angel in her Distress, *Beer-la-hai-roi*, the Well of him that liveth and looketh on me, *Gen.* 16. 14. Yea, the Saints have given, and God hath assumed to himself new Titles upon this very Score and Account; *Abraham's Jehovah-jireh*, and *Gideon's Jehovah-shallum* were ascribed to him upon this Reason. And sometimes you find the Lord styles himself, The God that brought *Abraham* from *Ur* of the *Chaldees*: Then the Lord God that brought them out of *Egypt*: Then the Lord that gathered them out of the North Country: Still minding them of the gracious Providences which in all those Places he had wrought for them.

Now there is a twofold Reflection upon the *Providential Works of God*.

1. One entire and full, in the whole Complex and perfect frame thereof. This blessed sight is reserved for the perfect state. It is in that Mount of God, where we shall see both the *Wilderness* and *Canaan*: The glorious Kingdom into which we are come, and the way through which we were led

When the Records of Eternity shall be exposed to view, all the Counsels and Results of that profound Wisdom look'd into; how will it transport? into it. There the Saints shall have a ravishing View of that beautiful Frame, and every part shall be distinctly discerned, as it had its particular use, and as it was connected with the other parts, and how effectually and orderly they all wrought to bring about that blessed design of their Salvation, according to the Promise, *Rom. 8. 28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, &c.* For it is certain, no Ship at Sea keeps more exactly by the Compass, which directs its course, than Providence doth by that Promise, which is its *Cynosura* and *Pole-star*.

when it shall be discerned, Lo, thus were the Designs laid: Here were the apt junctures and admirable dependencies of things, which when acted upon the stage of Time, seem'd so perplex'd and intricate, Howes Blessedness, page 76.

2. The other partial and imperfect in the way to Glory, where we only view it in its single Acts, or at most, in some Branches and more observable course of Actions.

Betwixt these two is the same difference, as betwixt the sight of the dis-jointed Wheels and scatter'd Pins of a Watch, and the sight of the whole united in one Frame, and working in one orderly Motion: Or, betwixt an ignorant Spectator's viewing some more observable Vessel or Joint of a dissected Body; and the accurate *Anatomist's* discerning the course of all the Veins and Arteries of the Body, as he follows the several Branches of them through the whole, and plainly sees the proper Places, Figure, and Use of each, with their mutual Respect to one another.

O how ravishing and delectable a sight is that! to behold at one View the whole Design of Providence, and the proper Place, and Use of every single Act, which we could not understand in this World:

The Mystery of Providence.

11

World : For what Christ said to Peter, *John 13.7.* is as applicable to some Providences in which we are now concern'd, as it was to that particular Action ; *What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know it.* All the dark intricate puzzling Providences at which we were sometimes so stumbled, and sometimes amazed, which we could neither reconcile with the Promise, nor with each other ; nay, which we so unjustly censured and bitterly bewailed, as if they had fallen out quite cross to our Happiness : We shall then see to be unto us, as the difficult Passage through the Wilderness was unto Israel, *The right way to a City of Habitation,* Psalm 107. 7.

And yet tho' our present Views and Reflections upon Providence be so short and imperfect in comparison of that in Heaven, yet such as it is, under all its present disadvantages, it hath so much Excellency and Sweetness in it, that I may call it a little Heaven, or as Jacob called his *Bethel, the Gate of Heaven.* 'Tis certainly an high-way of walking with God in this World, and as sweet Communion may a Soul enjoy with him in his Providences, as in any of his Ordinances. How often have the Hearts of its Observers been melted into Tears of Joy, at the beholding of its wise and unexpected Productions ! How often hath it convinced them, upon a sober Recollection of the Events of their Lives, that if the Lord had left them to their own Counsels, they had as often been their own Tormentors, if not Executioners ? Into what, and how many fatal Mischiefs had they precipitated themselves, if Providence had been as short-sighted as they ? They have given it their hearty thanks, for considering their Interest more than their Importance, and not suffering

Luther was bold to pre-
scribe to
God, but
at last
said, Rist
naud du-
bie hang
sapienti-
am Do-
minus, &
dixit, De
us tuum,
non le-
ring quax.

ring them to perish by their own Desires.

The Benefits of adverting the Works of Providence, are manifold and unspeakable ; as in its Place we shall shew you. But not to entangle the thread of the Discourse, I shall cast it into this Method.

First, I shall prove, that the Concernments of the Saints in this World, are certainly conducted by the Wisdom and Care of special Providence.

Secondly, I will shew you, in what particular Concernments of theirs this providential Care is evidently discover'd.

Thirdly, That it is the Duty of Saints to advert and heedfully observe these Performances of Providence for them in all their Concernments.

Fourthly, In what manner this Duty is to be perform'd by them.

Fifthly, What singular Benefits result to them from such Observations.

And then apply the whole in such Uses, as offer themselves from the Point.

The first General Head.

First, I shall undertake the Proof and Defence of this great Truth, *That the Affairs of the Saints in this World are certainly conducted by the Wisdom and Care of special Providence.*

And herein I address my self with Chearfulness, to perform (as I am able) a service for that Providence, which hath throughout my Life performed all things for me, as the Text speaks.

There is a twofold Consideration of Providence according to its twofold Object, and Manner of Dispensation ; the one is *general*, exercised about all Creatures, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate ; the other *special* and peculiar. Christ hath an universal Empire over all things, *Ephes.*

1. 22. The Head of the whole World, by way of *Dominion*; but an Head to the Church, by way of *Union* and *special Influence*, John 17. 2. *The Saviour of all Men, but especially of them that believe*, 1 Tim. 4. 10. The Church is his *special Care* and Charge; he rules the World for its good, as an Head consulting the Welfare of the Body.

Heathens generally denied Providence, and no wonder, since they denied a God: For the same Arguments that prove one, will prove the other. *Aristotle*, the Prince of *Heathen Philosophers*, could not by the utmost Search of Reason, find out the World's Original, and therefore concludes, it was from Eternity. The *Epicureans* did in a sort acknowledge a God, but yet denied a Providence, and wholly excluded him from any Interest or Concern in the Affairs of the World, as being inconsistent with the Felicity and Tranquility of the Divine Being, to be diverted and cumber'd with the Care and Labour of Government. This Assertion is so repugnant to Reason, that it is a wonder themselves blusht not at its Absurdity; but I guess at the Design, and one of them speaks it out in broad Language. *Itaque imposuistis cervicibus nostris sempiternum dominum, quem dies & noctes timeremus. Quis enim non timeat omnia providentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, & omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum & plenum negotii Deum?* Vell. apud Cicer. de Nat. Deorum. They foresaw, that the Concession of a Providence would impose an Eternal Yoak upon their Necks, by making them accountable for all they did to an higher Tribunal: And that they must necessarily pass the Time of their sojourning here in fear, whilst all their *Thoughts, Words* and *Ways* were strictly noted and recorded, in order to an Account

Account by an all-seeing and righteous God: And therefore laboured to perswade themselves that was not, which they had no mind should be. But these Atheistical and foolish Conceits fall flat before the undeniable Evidence of this so great and clear a Truth. Now,

My Business here, is not so much to deal with professed *Atheists*, who deny the Existence of God; and consequently deride all Evidences brought from Scripture, of the extraordinary Events that fall out in favour of that People that are called his: but rather to convince those, that professedly own all this; yet never having tasted Religion by Experience, suspect at least, that all these things which we call *special Providences* to the Saints, are but *natural Events*, or meer *Contingencies*: And thus, whilst they profess to own a God, and a Providence, (which Profession is but the Effect of their Education) they do in the mean time live like *Atheists*; and both think and act, as if there were no such things: And really I doubt, this is the Case of the far greatest part of the Men of this Generation.

But if it were indeed so, that the Affairs of the World in general, and more especially those of the Saints, were not conducted by Divine Providence, but (as they would perswade us) by the steady course of natural Causes: Beside which, if at any time we observe any Event to fall out, it is meerly casual and contingent, or that which proceeds from some hidden and secret cause in Nature: If this indeed were so, let them that are tempted to believe it, rationally satisfy the following Demands.

First Demand.

How comes it to pass, that so many signal Mer-

cies

cies and Deliverances have befallen the People of God, above the Power, and against the Course of natural Causes : To make way for which, there hath been a sensible Suspension and Stop put to the Course of Nature ? It is most evident, that no natural Effect can exceed the Power of its natural Cause. Nothing can give to another more than it hath in it self : And it is as clear, that whatsoever acts naturally, acts necessarily : Fire burns *ad ultimum sui posse* to the uttermost of its Power : Waters overflow, and drown all that they can. Lions and other rapacious and cruel Beasts, especially when hungry, tear and devour their Prey : And for *arbitrary* and rational Agents, they also act according to the Principles and Laws of their Natures. A wicked Man, when his Heart is fully set in him, and his Will stands in a full bent of Resolution, will certainly (if he have Power in his Hand, and Opportunity to execute his conceived Mischief) give it vent, and perpetrate the wicked Devices of his Heart : For having once conceived Mischief, and *travailing in Pain with it* (according to the Course of Nature) he must *bring it forth*, as it is *Psalms* 7. 14. But if any of these inanimate, brutal, or rational Agents, when there is no natural Obstacle or *Remora*, have their Power suspended, and that when the Effect is near the birth, and the Design at the very Article of Execution, so that tho' they would, yet cannot hurt ; to what think you is this to be assign'd and referr'd ? Yet so it hath often been seen, where God's Interest hath been immediately concern'd in the Danger and Evil of the Event. The Sea divided it self in its own Channel, and made a Wall of Water, on each side, to give God's distressed *Israel* a safe Passage, and that not in a Calm,

* How Calm, but when the Waves thereof roared; * as
 hard was it is *Isa.* 51. 15. The Fire, when blown up to the
 Porphyry most intense and vehement Flame, had no Pow-
 put to it, er to singe one Hair of God's faithful Witnesses,
 when in- er to singe one Hair of God's faithful Witnesses,
 head of a when at the same Instant it had Power to destroy
 better, this their intended *Executioners* at a greater distance,
 Pretence *Dan.* 3. 22. Yea, we find it hath some time been
 must serve sufficient to consume, but not to torment the Bo-
 the turn. dy; as in that known Instance of blessed *Baynham*,
 That Mo- who told his Enemies, the Flames were to him
 ses taking as a Bed of Roses. The hungry Lions put off
 the Advan- their natural Fierceness, and became gentle and
 tage of a harmless, when *Daniel* was cast among them for
 low Water a Prey. The like Account the Church Story
 unknown gives us of *Polycarpe*, and *Dionysius Areopagita*,
 to the E- whom the Fire would not touch, but stood after
 gyptians, the manner of a Ship-man's Sails filled with the
 passed over the People As if Mo- Wind about them.

Are these things according to the Course and
 ses a Law of Nature? To what secret natural Cause
 Stranger, can they be ascribed? In like manner, we find
 were better acquainted there, the vilest, and fiercest of wicked Men, have been
 than the with-held by an invisible Hand of Restraint from
 Egyptian injuring the Lord's People. By what secret Cause
 Natives. in Nature was *Jeroboam's* Hand dried up, and
 Acts and Mon. Vol. made inflexible at the same Instant it was stretch-
 1. P. 55. ed out against the Man of God? *1 Kings* 13. 4.
 No wild Beasts rend and devour their Prey more
 greedily than wicked Men would destroy the
 People of God that dwell among them, were it
 not for this Providential Restraint upon them.
 So the *Psalmist* expresses his Case in the Words
 following my Text, *My Soul is among Lions, and*
I lie among them that are set on fire. The *Disciples*
 were sent forth as Sheep into the midst of *Wolves*,
Mat. 10. 16. It will not avail in this Case to ob-
 ject,

ject, Those miraculous Events depend only upon Scripture testimony, which the *Atheist* is not concluded by: for beside all that may be alledged for the Authority of that Testimony (which is needless to produce to Men that own it) what is it less that every Eye sees, or may see at this day? Do we not behold a weak defenceless handful of Men, wonderfully, and (except this way) unaccountably preserved from Ruin in the midst of potent, enraged and turbulent Enemies, that fain would, but cannot destroy them, when as yet no natural Impediment can be assigned why they cannot?

And if this pose us, what shall we say, when we see Events produced in the World for the good of God's chosen, by those very hands and means, which were intentionally imployed for their Ruin? These things are as much beside the intentions of their Enemies, as they are above their own Expectations; yet such things are no Rarities in the World. Was not the Envy of *Joseph's* Brethren, the cursed Plot of *Haman*, the Decree procured by the Envy of the Princes against *Daniel*, with many more of the like nature, all turned by a secret and strange Hand of Providence, to their greater Advancement and Benefit? their Enemies lifted them up to all that Honour and Preferment they had.

Second Demand.

How is it (if the Saints Concerns are not order'd by a special Divine Providence) *that natural Causes unite and associate themselves for their relief and benefit in so strange a manner as they are found to do?* It is undeniably evident, that there are marvellous Co-incidencies of Providence, confederating and agreeing, as it were, to meet and unite themselves to bring about the good of God's Chosen. There
is

is a like face of things shewing it self in divers Places at that time, when any Work for the good of the Church is come upon the Stage of the World : A when the *Messiah*, the Capital Mercy, came to the Temple, then *Simeon* and *Anna* were brought thither by Providence, as Witnesses to it. So in Reformation-work, when the Images were pulled down in *Holland*, one and the same Spirit of Zeal possessed them in every *City* and *Town*, that the Work was done in a Night. He that heedfully reads the History of *Joseph's* Advancement to be the Lord of *Egypt*, may number in that Story twelve remarkable Acts or Steps of Providence, by which he ascended to that Honour and Authority : If but one of them had failed, in all likelihood the Event had done so too ; but every one fell in its order, exactly keeping its own time and place. So in the Church's Deliverance from the Plot of *Haman*, we find no less than seven Acts of Providence concurring strangely to produce it, as if they had all met by appointment and consent, to break that snare for them ; one thing so aptly suiting with, and making way for another, that every heedful Observer must needs conclude, this cannot be the effect of *Casualty*, but wise *Counsel*. Even as in viewing the accurate Structure of the Body of a Man, the Figure, Position, and mutual respects of the several Members and Vessels, hath convinced some, (and is sufficient to convince all) that it was the effect of Divine Wisdom and Power : in like manner, if the admirable Adaptation of the Means and Instruments employed for Mercy to the People of God, be heedfully considered, who can but confess, that as there are Tools of all sorts and sizes in the Shop of Providence, so there is a most skilful Hand

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that

that uses them? and that they could no more produce such Effects of themselves, than the Ax, Saw or Chisel can cut or carve a rude Log into a beautiful Figure, without the Hand of a skilful Artificer.

We find by manifold Instances, that there certainly are strong Combinations, and Predispositions of Persons and Things, to bring about some Issue and Design for the Benefit of the Church, which themselves never thought of: They hold no Intelligence, communicate not their Counsels to each other, yet meet together and work together, as if they did; which is, as if ten Men should all meet together at one Place, and in one Hour, about one and the same Business, and that without any Fore-appointment betwixt themselves. Can any question, but such a Meeting of Means and Instruments is certainly, tho' secretly over-ruled, by some Wise invisible Agent?

Third Demand.

If the Concerns of God's People be not governed by special Providence, *Whence is it, that the most apt and powerful Means employed to destroy them, are render'd ineffectual, and weak contemptible Means employed for their Defence and Comfort, crowned with Success?* This could never be, if things were wholly swayed by the Course of Nature. If we judge by that Rule, we must conclude, the more apt and powerful the Means are, the more successful and prosperous they must needs be; and where they are inept, weak and contemptible, nothing can be expected from them. Thus Reason lays it according to the Rules of Nature; but Providence crosses its Hands, as *Jacob* did in blessing the Sons of *Joseph*, and orders quite

quite contrary Issues and Events. Such was the mighty Power and deep Policy used by *Pharaoh* to destroy God's *Israel*, that to the eye of Reason, it was as impossible to survive it, as for crackling Thorns to abide unconsumed amidst devouring Flames; by which Emblem their miraculous Preservation is expressed, *Exod.* 3. 2. the Bush was all in a flame, but no consumption of it. The Heathen *Roman* Emperors, who made the World tremble, and subdued the Nations under them, have employed all their Power and Policy against the poor naked defenceless Church, to ruin it, yet could not accomplish it, *Rev.* 12. 3, 4. O the Seas of Blood that *Heathen Rome* shed in the ten Persecutions! yet the Church lives, and when the Dragon gave his Power to the Beast, *Rev.* 12. 2. (*i. e.*) the State of *Rome* became Antichristian, O what Slaughters have been made by the Beast in all his Dominions; so that the Holy Ghost represents him as drunken with the Blood of the Saints, *Rev.* 17. 6. And yet all will not do, the Gates, (*i. e.*) the Powers and Policies of Hell cannot prevail against it. How manifest is the care and power of Providence herein? Had half that Power been employed against any other People, it had certainly swallowed them up immediately, or in the hundredth part of the time worn them out. How soon was the *Persian* Monarchy swallowed up by the *Grecian*, and that again by the *Roman*? *Dioclesian* and *Maximine* in the height of their Persecution found themselves so baffled by Providence, that they both resigned the Government, and lived as private Men. But in this wonderful Preservation God makes good that Promise, *Jer.* 30. 11. *Tho' I make a full end of all Nations, yet will I not make a full end of Thee: and that*

Acts and
Mon. Vol.
3. p. 974.

that in *Isa. 54. 17.* No weapon formed against thee shall prosper.

On the contrary, how successful have weak and contemptible Means been made for the good of the Church? Thus in the first planting of Christianity in the world, by what weak and improbable Instruments was it done? Christ did not chuse the eloquent *Orators*, or Men of Authority in the Courts of *Kings* and *Emperors*, but twelve poor *Mechanicks*, and Fishermen; and these not sent together in a Troop, but some to take one Country to conquer it, and some another: the most ridiculous Course (in appearance) for such a Design, as could be imagined; and yet in how short a time was the Gospel spread, and the Churches planted by them in the several Kingdoms of the World? This the *Psalmist* foresaw by the Spirit of Prophecy, when he said, *Out of the Mouth of Babes and Sucklings hast thou ordained Strength, to still the Enemy; and the Avenger,* *Psal. 8. 2.* At the sound of Rams-horns *Jericho* is delivered into the hands of *Israel*; see *Josh. 6. 20.* By three hundred Men with their Pitchers and Lamps, the huge Host of *Midian* is discomfited, *Judges 6. 19.* The *Protestants* besieged in *Beziers* in *France* are delivered by a drunken *Drummer*, who going to his Quarters at Midnight, rang the Alarm-Bell of the Town, not knowing what he did; and just then were their Enemies making their Assault. And as weak and improbable means have been blessed with Success to the Church in general, so to the Preservation of its particular Members also. A Spider by weaving her Web over the Mouth of an Oven shall hide a Servant of Christ, *Du Moulin* from his Enemies, who took refuge there in that bloody *Parisian* Massacre. A

Hen shall sustain another many days at the same time, by lodging her Egg every day in the Place where he had hid himself from the Cut-throats. Examples might be easily multiplied in the case; but the Truth is too plain and obvious to the Observation of all Ages to need them. And can we but acknowledge a divine and special Providence over-ruling these Matters, when we see the most apt and potent Means for the Churches Ruin frustrated, and the most silly and contemptible Means succeeded and prospered for its good?

Fourth Demand.

If all things be governed by the Course of Nature, and Force of natural Causes, *How then comes it to pass, that Men are turned (like a Bowl by a Rub) out of the way of Evil, unto which they were driving on with full speed?* Good Men have been engaged in the way to their own Ruin, and knew it not; but Providence hath met them in the way and preserved them by strange Diversions, the Meaning of which they understood not, till the Event discovered it. Paul lay bound at Cæsarea, the High Priest and chief of the Jews request Festus, that he might be brought bound to Jerusalem, having laid wait in the way to kill him; but Festus (tho' ignorant of the Plot) utterly refuses it, but chuses rather to go with them to Cæsarea, and judge him there: by this Rub, the bloody Design is frustrated, *Acts 25. 3, 4.*

Possid. in
vit. Aug.
cap. 15.

Possidonius, in the Life of Augustine, tells us, that the good Father going to teach the People of a certain Town, took a Guide with him, to shew him the way: the Guide mistook the usual Road and ignorantly fell into a By-path, by which means he escaped Ruin by the hands of the bloody

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Donatists, who knowing his Intention, way-laid him to kill him in the Road.

And as memorable and wonderful are those Rubs and Diversions wicked Men have met with in the way of perpetrating the Evils conceiv'd and intended in their own Hearts. *Laban* and *Esau* Gen. 31. came against *Jacob* with mischievous Purposes; ^{24.} but no sooner are they come nigh him, but the Shackles of Restraint are immediately clapt upon them both, so that their Hands cannot perform their Enterprizes. *Balaam* runs greedily for Reward to curse *Israel*; but meets with an unexpected Check at his very Out-set; and tho' that stopt him not, but he essay'd every way to do them Mischief, yet he still finds himself fetter'd by an effectual Bond of Restraint, that he can no way shake off, *Numb.* 22. 25, 38. *Saul* the High-Priest's Blood-hound, breathes out Threatnings against the Church, and goes with a bloody Commission towards *Damascus*, to hale the poor Flock of Christ to the Slaughter; but when he comes nigh the Place, he meets an unexpected Stop in the way, by which the Mischief is not only diverted, but himself converted to Christ, *Acts* 9. 1, 2, 3, 4. Who can but see the Finger of God in these things?

Fifth Demand.

If there be not an over-ruling Providence ordering all things for the good of God's People, How comes it to pass, that the Good and Evil which is done to them in this World, is accordingly repaid into the Bosoms of them that are instrumental therein?

1. How clear is it to every Man's Observation, that the Kindnesses and Benefits any have done to the Lord's People, have been rewarded with full Measure into their Bosoms? The Egyptian

Divine Conduct: Or,

Midwives refused to obey *Pharaoh's* inhuman Command, and saved the Male Children of *Israel*: For this the Lord dealt well with them, and built them Houses, *Exod.* 1. 21. The *Shunamite* was hospitable, and careful for *Elisha*, and God recompenced it with the desirable Enjoyment of a Son, 2 *Kings* 4. 9, 17. *Rahab* hid the Spies, and was exempted from the common Destruction for it, *Heb.* 11. 31. *Publius*, the chief Man of the Island *Melita*, courteously received and lodged *Paul* after his Shipwrack: The Lord speedily repaid him for that Kindness, and healed his Father, who lay sick at that time of a Bloody Flux and Fever, *Acts* 28. 7, 8.—

Si ab ex-
ordio
mundi, ad
nostram
usque me-
moriam
percurra-
mus hi-
storias, in-
signia di-
vinæ ulti-
onis in
peccato-
res occur-
rent indi-
cia. *Alste-*
dii Nat.
Theol. p.
196.

In like manner, we find the Evils done to God's People have been repaid, by a just Retribution to their Enemies.

Pharaoh and the *Egyptians* were cruel Enemies to God's *Israel*, and design'd the Ruin of their poor innocent Babes; and God repaid it, in smiting all the First-born of *Egypt* in one Night, *Exod.* 12. 19.

Haman erected a *Gallows* fifty Cubits high for good *Mordecai*, and God so ordered it, that himself and his ten Sons were hanged on it. And indeed it was but meet, that he should eat the Fruit of that Tree, which himself had planted, *Esther* 7. 10.

Ahithophel plots against *David*, and gives Counsel like an Oracle, how to procure his Fall; and that very Counsel, like a surcharged Gun, recoils upon himself, and procures his Ruin: For seeing his good Counsel rejected, (good politically, not morally) it was now easy for him to guess at the Issue, and so at his own Fate, 2 *Sam.* 17. 23.

Charles the Ninth most inhumanly made the very Canals of *Paris* to stream with Protestant Blood, and soon after he died miserably, his Blood streaming from all Parts of his Body.

Stephen Gardiner, that burnt so many of Gods dear Servants to Ashes, was himself so scorched up by a terrible Inflammation, that his very Tongue was black, and hung out of his Mouth, and in dreadful Torments ended his wretched Days.

Maximinus that cruel Emperor, who set forth his Proclamation engraven in Brass, for the utter abolishing of the Christian Religion, was speedily smitten like *Herod*, with a dreadful Judgment, Swarms of Lice preying upon his Entrails, and causing such a stench that his Physicians could not endure to come nigh him, and for refusing it were slain. Hundreds of like Instances might easily be produced, to confirm this Observation. And who can but see by these things, that verily *there is a God that judgeth in the Earth?*

Yea, so exact have been the *Retributions* of Providence to the Enemies of the Church, that not only the same Persons, but the same Members that have been the *Instruments* of *Mischief*, have been made the *Subjects* of *Wrath*.

The same *Arm* which *Jeroboam* stretched out to smite the Prophet, God smites. The Emperor *Aurelian*, when he was ready to subscribe the *E-* Euseb. 1.7. cap. 29. *dict* for the Persecution of the *Christians*, was suddenly cramped in his *Knuckles*, that he could not write.

Mr. *Greenhill*, in his Exposition upon *Ezek. 11. 13.* tells his Auditory, that there was one then present in the Congregation, who was an Eye-witness of a Woman scoffing at another for purity and holy walking, who had her tongue stricken

immediately with the Palsie, and died thereof within two days.

Henry the Second of France in a great Rage against a *Protestant Counsellor*, committed him to the Hands of one of his Nobles to be imprisoned, and that with these Words, that *he would see him burned with his own Eyes*; but Mark the righteous Providence of God, within a few days after, the same Nobleman, with a Lance put into his hands by the King, did at a *Tilting Match* run the said King into one of his Eyes, whereof he died.

Yea, Providence hath made the very place of sinning, the place of Punishment, *1 Kings 21. 19. In the place where Dogs licked the Blood of Naboth shall Dogs lick thy Blood*: and it was exactly fulfilled, *2 Kings 9. 26.* Thus *Tophet* is made a burying Place for the *Jews*, till there was no room to bury; and that was the place where they had offer'd up their Sons to *Moloch*, *Jer. 7. 31, 32.* The Story of *Nightingale* is generally known, which *Mr. Fox* relates, how he fell out of the Pulpit and brake his Neck, whilst he was abusing that Scripture, *1 John 1. 10.*

And thus the Scriptures are made good by Providence, whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein, and he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him, *Prov. 26. 27.* and *Matth. 7. 2.* with what measure you mete, it shall be measur'd to you again.

Object.

If any shall yet say, *These things may fall out casually; That many thousands of the Churches Enemies have died in peace, and their End been like other Men.*

Sol.

We answer with *Augustine*, If no Sin were punished here, no Providence would be believed; and if every Sin should be punish'd here, no Judgment would be expected. But, that none may think

think these Events to be meerly casual and accidental, we yet further demand.

Sixth Demand.

If these things be meerly casual, *how is it that they square and agree so exactly with the Scriptures in all particulars?*

We read, *Amos 3. 3. Can two walk together except they be agreed?* If two Men travel in one Road, it's like they are agreed to go to the same Place. Providences and Scriptures go all one Way: And if they seem at any time to go diverse or contrary Ways; be sure, they will meet at the Journey's End. There is an Agreement betwixt them so to do.

Doth God miraculously suspend the power of natural Causes, as in the *first Demand* was open'd? Why, this is no accidental thing, but what harmonizeth with the word, *Isa. 43. 2. When thou passest through the Waters, I will be with thee, and through the Rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the Fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the Flame kindle upon thee.*

Do natural Causes unite and associate themselves for the good of God's People? Why, this is no more than what is contain'd in the Promises, and is but the fulfilling of that Scripture, *1 Cor. 3. 22. All is yours, for ye are Christ's; (i. e.) the Use, Benefit and Service of all the Creatures is for you, as your Need shall require.*

Are the most apt and powerful means employed for their Ruin frustrated? Who can but see the Scriptures fulfilled in, and expounded by such Providences? See *Isa. 45. 15, 16, 17. and 8. 8, 9, 10. expounded by 2 Kings 18. 17. & seq.*

See you at any time a Rub of Providence diverting the course of good Men from falling into evil,

evil, or wicked Men from committing evil ; how loudly do such Providences proclaim the truth and certainty of the Scriptures, which tell us, *That the way of Man is not in himself, neither is it in him that walks to direct his Steps*, Jer. 10. 23. and that in Prov. 16. 9. *A Man's Heart deviseth his Way, but the Lord directeth his Steps.*

Do you see adequate Retributions made to those that injure or befriend the People of God? Why, when you see all the Kindness and Love they have shown the Saints return'd with an Over-plus into their Bosoms ; how is it possible, but you must see the Accomplishment of these Scriptures in such Providences ? *Isa. 32. 8. 2 Cor. 9. 6. The liberal Soul deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things he shall stand.*

And when you see the Evils Men have done, or intended to do to the Lord's people, recoiling upon themselves ; he is perfectly blind, that sees not the Harmony such Providences bear with these Scriptures, *Psal. 140. 11, 12. Psal. 7. 14, 15, 16. Psal. 9. 16.*

O what exact Proportions do Providences and Scriptures hold ! little do Men take Notice of it. Why did *Cyrus*, contrary to all Rules of State-Policy freely dismiss the Captives, but to fulfil that Scripture, *Isa. 45. 13.* So that it was well observed by one, that as God hath stretch'd out the *Expansum* or Firmament over the natural, so he hath stretch'd out his Word over the rational World. And as the Creatures on Earth are influenc'd by those Heavenly Bodies, so are all Creatures in the World influenc'd by the Word, and do infallibly fulfil it, when they design to cross it.

Seventh Demand.

If these things be contingent, *How is it that they fall out in such remarkable Nicks and Junctures*
of

of time, which makes them so greatly observable to all that consider them.

We find a multitude of Providences so timed to a Minute, that had they fallen out never so little sooner or later, they had signified but little what now they do. Certainly, it cannot be casually, Contin- but Counsel, that so exactly nicks the Opportu- gentia re- nity. Contingencies keep to no Rules. rum æsti- manda est

è causis proximis, secundis, & particularibus, non è causa prima, & universali, respectu cuius nihil contingens est, sed omnia necessaria, necessitate immutabilitatis non causæ. *Wendelin. Theol. p. 13.*

How remarkable to this Purpose, was the tidings brought to *Saul*, that the *Philistines* had invaded the Land? *1 Sam. 23. 27.* just as he was ready to grasp the Prey. The Angel calls to *Abraham*, and shews him another Sacrifice, just when his hand was giving the fatal Stroke to *Isaac*, *Gen. 22. 10, 11.* A Well of Water is discovered to *Hagar*, just when she had left the Child, as not able to see its Death, *Gen. 21. 16, 19.* *Rabshakeb* meets with a blasting Providence, hears a Rumour that frustrated his Design, just when ready to give the Shock against *Jerusalem*, *Isa. 27. 7, 8.* So when *Haman's* Plot against the *Jews* was ripe, and all things ready for Execution; *On that Night could not the King sleep*, *Esth. 6. 1.* When the Horns are ready to gore *Judah*, immediately *Carpenters* are prepared to fray them away, *Zech. 1. 18, 19, 20, 21.* How remarkable was the Relief of *Rochel* by a Shoal of Fish, that came into the Harbour, when they were ready to perish with Famine, such as they never observed before, nor after that time. *Mr. Dod* could not go to Bed one Night, but hath a strong Impulse to visit, (though unseasonably) a Neighbour Gentleman, and

and just as he came, he meets him at his Door, with an Halter in his Pocket, just going to hang himself. Dr. Tate and his Wife, in the *Irish Rebellion*, flying through the Woods with a Sucking Child, which was just ready to expire; the Mother going to rest it upon a Rock, puts her Hand upon a Bottle of warm Milk, by which it was preserved. A good Woman (from whose Mouth I received it) being driven to a great Extremity, all Supplies failing, was exceedingly plunged into unbelieving Doubts and Fears, not seeing whence Supplies should come; when lo! in the nick of Time, turning some things in a Chest, unexpectedly lights upon a Piece of Gold, which supplied her present Wants, till God open'd another Door of Supply. If these things fall out casually, how is it they observe the very nick of Time so exactly? as that it is become Proverbial in Scripture, Gen. 22. 14. *In the Mount of the Lord it shall be seen.*

Eighth Demand.

Lastly, *Were these things casual and contingent, how can it be, that they should fall out so immediately upon, and consonantly to the Prayers of the Saints? So that in many Providences, they are able to discern a very clear Answer to their Prayers, and are sure they have the Petitions they asked of him, 1 John 5. 15.*

Thus when the Sea divided it self, just upon Israel's cry to Heaven, *Exod. 14. 10.* When so signal a Victory is given to *Asa*, immediately upon that pathetic cry to Heaven, *Help us, O Lord our God, 2 Chron. 14. 11, 12.* When *Ahitophel* shall go and hang himself, just upon that Prayer of distressed *David*, *2 Sam. 15. 31.* When *Haman* shall fall and his Plot be broken, just upon the Fast kept by *Mordecai* and *Hester*, *Esth. 4. 16.* Our
own

own *Speed*, in his History of *Britain*, tells us, that *Richard* the First besieged a Castle with his Army, they offered to surrender, if he would save their Lives; he refuses, and threatens to hang them all: Upon this an *Arbalafter* charged his Bow with a square Arrow, making first his Prayer to God, that he would direct the shot, and deliver the Innocent from Oppression; it struck the *King* himself, whereof he died, and they were delivered. *Abraham's* Servant prayed for success; and see how it was answered, *Gen.* 24. 45. *Peter* was cast into Prison, and Prayer was made for him by the Church, and see the Event, *Acts* 12. 5, 6, 7, 12. I could easily add to these, the wonderful Examples of the return of Prayers which was observed in *Luther*, and *Dr. Winter* in *Ireland*, and many more; but I judge it needless, because most Christians have a stock of Experience of their own, and are well assured, that many of the Providences that befall them are, and can be no other than the return of their Prayers.

And now who can be dissatisfied in this Point, that wisely consider these things? Must we not conclude as it is, *Job* 36. 7. *He withdraweth not his Eye from the Righteous*: And as *2 Chron.* 16. 9. *The Eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole Earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose Heart is perfect towards him*. His Providences proclaim him to be a God hearing Prayers.

The Second General Head.

Having proved that the Concernments of the Saints in this World, are certainly conducted by the Wisdom and Care of special Providence; my next Work is to shew you, *In what Affairs and*
Con-

Concerns of theirs, the Providence of God doth more especially appear; or what are the most remarkable Performances of Providence for them in this World.

And here I am not led directly by my Text, to speak of the most Internal and Spiritual Performances of Providence, immediately relating to the Souls of his People; though they all relate to their Souls mediately and eventually; but of the more visible and external Performances of Providence for them: And it is not to be supposed, I should touch all these neither; they are more than the Sands; but that which I aim at, is to discourse to you some more special and more observable Performances of Providence for you. And we shall begin at the beginning.

The first Performance of Providence.

I.

Providential Performances in our Formation and Protection in the Womb.

And First, Let us consider, how well Providence hath performed the first Work that ever it did for us, in our *Formation* and *Protection* in the *Womb*. Certainly, this is a very glorious and admirable Performance; it's that the *Psalmist* admires, *Psalm 139. 15. My Substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lower Parts of the Earth.* The *Womb* is so called upon this account, because as curious Artists, when they have some choice Piece in Hand, perfect it in private, and then bring it into the Light for all to gaze at; so it was here. And there are two Things admirable in this Performance of Providence for us.

I. The rare Structure and excellent Composition of the Body; *I am wonderfully made*; that Word *Ruchampti*—is very full. The Vulgar renders it, *painted as with a Needle*, (i. e.) richly embroi-

embroidered with Nerves and Veins. Oh the curious Workmanship that is in that one part the Eye! How hath it forced some to acknowledge a God upon the Examination of it! Providence, when it went about this Work, had its model or pattern before it, according to which it molded every part, as it is, *ver. 16. In thy Book were all my members written.* Hast thou an integral Perfection and Fulness of Members? It is because he wrote them all in his Book, or limned out thy Body, according to that exact model which he drew of thee in his own gracious purpose, before thou hadst a Being: Had an Eye, an Ear, a Hand, a Foot been wanting in the Platform, thou hadst now been sadly sensible of the defect: This World had been a Dungeon to thee, without those Windows: Thou hadst lived, as many do, an Object of Pity to others: If thou have low Thoughts of this Mercy, ask the Blind, the Deaf, the Lame and the Dumb, the value and Worth of those Mercies, and they will tell thee. There is a World of Cost bestowed upon thy very Body. Thou mightest have been cast into another Mold, and created a Worm or a Toad. I remember *Luther* tells us of two Cardinals, riding in great pomp to the Council of *Constance*, and by the way they heard a Man in the Fields bitterly weeping and wailing: When they came to him, they found him intently viewing an ugly Toad; and asking him why he

*Metapho-
ra ab acu-
pictoribus
in opere
Phrygio-
nico.
Omnia o-
peratus
est domi-
nus in
pondere,
numero,
& men-
sura.*

*Luther in
tertium
Præcept.
There are
some Mem-
bers that*

are radical, as the Liver, Heart and Brain, in these are placed the natural, vital and animal Spirits; these Spirits are carried by the Veins, Arteries and Nerves. The Veins carry the natural Spirits from the Liver, the Arteries the vital Spirits from the Heart, the Nerves the animal Spirits from the Brain: Other Members are official, as the Hands and Feet: The Superiour doth rule the Inferiour, and the Inferiour support the Superiour: In Wisdom hast thou made them all.

wept so bitterly, he told them his Heart was melted with this Consideration, that God had not made him such a loathsome and deformed Creature; *hoc est quod amarè fleo*, said he: Whereupon one of them cries out, Well said the Father, *Surgunt indocti, & rapiunt Cælum*, The unlearned will rise and take Heaven, and we with all our Learning shall be cast into Hell. No part of the Common Lump was so figur'd and polish'd as *Man* is. *Galen* gave *Epicurus* an hundred Years Time to imagine a more commodious Scituation, Configuration, or Composition of any one Member of a human Body. And if all the *Angels* had studied to this day, they could not have cast the Body of *Man* into a more curious Mold.

2. And yet all this is but the enamelling of the Case, or polishing the Casket wherein the rare Jewel lies. Providence hath not only built the House, but brought the Inhabitant (I mean the Soul) into the Possession of it. A glorious Piece it is, that bears the very Image of God upon it, being all in all, and all in every part. How noble are its Faculties and Affections? How nimble, various and indefatigable are its Motions? How comprehensive is its Capacity? It's a Companion for *Angels*, nay, capable of Espousals to *Christ*, and eternal Communion with God. It's the Wonder of Earth, and the Envy of Hell.

Suppose now, (and why should you not suppose what you so frequently behold in the World?) that Providence had so permitted and order'd it, that thy Soul had entred into thy Body with one or two of its Faculties wounded and defective: Suppose its *Understanding* had been crackt; what a miserable Life hadst thou lived in this World? neither capable of Service nor Comfort. And truly

truly when I have consider'd those Works of Providence, in bringing into the World in all Countries and Ages some such spectacles of pity; some deprived of the use of Reason, and differing from Beasts, in little more than shape and figure; and others, though sound in their Understandings, yet deformed or defective in their Bodies, monstrous, mishapen and loathsome Creatures; I can resolve the design of this Providence, into nothing beside a demonstration of his Sovereign Power: except they be designed as foils, to set off the beauty of other rare and exquisite pieces, and intended to stand before your eyes, as Monitors of God's Mercy to you, that your Hearts (as oft as you beheld them) might be melted into Thankfulness for distinguishing Favour to you.

Look then (but not proudly) upon thy outside and inside, see and admire what Providence hath done for thee, and how well it hath *performed* the first service that ever it did for thee in this World. And yet, this was not all it did for thee, before thou sawest this World: It preserved thee, as well as formed thee in the Womb; else thou hadst been as those *Embryos* *Job* speaks of, *Job* 3. 11, 12. *that never saw the light.* *Abortives* go for nothing in the World, and there are multitudes of them, some that never had a reasonable Soul breathed into them; but only the rudiments, and rough draught of body: these come not into the account of Men, but perish as the Beast doth. Others that die in, or shortly after they come out of the Womb; and though their Life was but for a moment; yet that moment entails an Eternity upon them: and had this been your case, as it is the case of Millions, then (supposing

sing your Salvation) yet had you been utterly unserviceable to God in the World: None had been the better for you, nor you the better for any in the World. You had been utterly incapable of all that good which throughout your Life you have either done to others, or received from others.

And if we consider the Nature of that obscure Life we lived in the Womb; how small an accident (had it been permitted by Providence) had extinguished our Life, like a Bird in the shell? We cannot therefore but admire the tender care of Providence over us, and say with the Psalmist, Psal. 139. 13. *Thou hast covered me in my Mother's Womb:* and not only so, but as it is, Psal. 22. 9. *Thou art he that took me out of my Mother's Womb.* He preserved thee there to the Fulness of Time, and when that Time was come, brought thee safely through manifold hazards, into that place in the World which he from Eternity espied for thee. Which leads us to the second Performance.

The Second Performance of Providence.

II.

Providential Performances with respect to the Time and Place of our Nativity. The second great Performance of Providence, for the People of God, respects the place and time in which it ordered their Nativity to fall. And truly, this is no small Concernment to every one of us, but of vast Consequence, either to our good or evil, though it be little minded by most Men. I am perswaded, the Thoughts of few Christians penetrate deep enough into this Providence, but slide too slightly and superficially over an Abyss of much Mercy, rich and manifold Mercy wrapt up in this gracious Performance of Providence for them.

Ah

Ah Friends! can you think it an indifferent thing, into what part of the World the Womb of Nature had cast you out? Is there no odds, upon what Spot of the Creation, or in what Age of the World your lot had fallen? It may be you have not seriously bethought your selves about this Matter. And because this Point is so seldom touch'd, I will therefore dive a little more particularly and distinctly into it, and endeavour to warm your Affections with a Representation of the many and rich Benefits you owe to this one Performance of Providence for you.

And we will consider it under a double respect or relation, as it respects your present Comfort in this World, and as it relates to your eternal Happiness in the World to come.

I. This Performance of Providence for you, doth very much concern your *present Comfort* in this World. All the Rooms in this great House are not alike pleasant and commodious for the Inhabitants of it. You read, *Psal. 74. 20. of the dark places of the Earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty*: and many such dismal places are found in the habitable Earth. What a vast tract of the World lies as a waste Wilderness.

Suppose your Mothers had brought you forth in *America*, among the *Salvage Indians*, who herd together as brute beasts; are scorched with heat, and starved with cold; being naked, destitute and defenceless. How poor, miserable and unprovided of earthly Comforts and Accomodations, are many Millions of the Inhabitants of this World? What Mercies do you enjoy in respect of the Amenity, Fertility, Temperature and Civility of the Place of your Habitation? What is it but a Garden inclosed out of a Wilderness? I

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Speed's
Chron.

may without partiality or vanity say, God has (even upon temporal accounts) provided you with one of the healthfullest, pleasantest, and in all respects, the best furnished room in all the great house of this World. Hear what our own *Chronicler* saith of it, *It is the fortunate Island, the Paradise of Pleasure, the Garden of God; whose Valleys are like Eden, whose Hills are as Lebanon, whose Springs are as Pisgah, whose Rivers are like Jordan, whose Wall is the Ocean, and whose Defence is the Lord Jehovah.*

You are here provided of necessary and comfortable Accommodations for your Bodies, though a great part of the World are unacquainted with it. It is not with the poorest among us, as it is said to be with the poor *Russians*, whose Poverty pinches and bites with such sharp teeth, that the poor cry at the doors, *Give me and cut me, give me and kill me.*

Say not, The barbarous Nations in this exclude you: that they possess the *Mines* of Silver and Gold, which it may be you think enough to salve all other Inconveniences of Life. Alas poor Creatures! better had it been for them, if their Countrey had brought forth *Bryers* and *Thorns* instead of *Gold*, *Silver*, and *precious Stones*; for this hath been the occasion of ruining all their other Comforts in this World: this hath invited their cruel avaritious Enemies among them, under whose servitude they groan, and die without Mercy, and thousands of them have chosen death rather than life, on the terms they enjoyed it. And why might not your lot have fallen there as well as where it is? Are not they made of the same clay, and endowed with as good a nature as your selves? O what a distinction hath Di-

ine Mercy made, where Nature made none! Consider, ungrateful Man, thou mightest have fallen into some of those Regions, where a tainted air frequently cloyes the jaws of Death, where the Inhabitants differ very little from the Beasts in the manner of their living: but God hath provided for thee, and given the poorest among us far better Accommodations of Life, than the greatest among them are ordinarily provided with. O what hath Providence done for you?

But all that I have said is very inconsiderable, in comparison with the *spiritual Mercies*, and Advantages you here enjoy for your Souls. Oh, this is such an advantageous cast of Providence for you, as obliges you to a thankful Acknowledgment of it, to all Eternity. For let us here make but a few suppositions in the case before us, and the glory of Providence will shine like a Sun-beam full in your Faces.

(1.) Suppose it had been your Lot to have fallen in any of those vast *Continents* possessed by *Pagans* and *Heathens* at this day, who bow down to the Stock of a Tree, and worship the Host of Heaven. This is the case of Millions, and Millions of Millions: for *Pagan Idolaters* (as that searching Scholar Mr. *Brierwood* informs us) do not only fill the circumference of nine hundred miles in *Europe*, but almost the one half of *Africa*, more than the half of *Asia*, and almost the whole of *America*. Brierwood's Enquiries, chap. 13. p. 118, 119.

Oh how deplorable had thy case been, if a *Pagan Idolatress* had brought thee forth, and Idolatry had been suck'd in with thy Mother's milk! then in all probability, thou hadst been at this day worshipping *Devils*, and posting with full speed in the direct road to Damnation: for these

are the people of God's wrath, *Jer. 10. 25. Pour out thy fury upon the Heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name.* How dreadful is that imprecation against them? *Psalms 97. 7. which takes hold of them and all that's theirs, Confounded be all they that serve graven Images, that boast themselves of Idols.*

(2.) Or suppose your Lot had fallen among *Mahometans*, who next to Pagans spread over the greatest tract of the Earth: For though *Arabia* bred that unclean Bird, yet it was not that Cage, that could long contain him; for, not only the *Arabians*, but the *Persians*, *Turks* and *Tartars*, do all bow down their backs under that grand Impostor. This poison hath dispersed it self through the veins of *Asia*, over a great part of *Africk*, even the Circumference of seven thousand miles, and stops not there, but hath tainted a considerable part of *Europe* also.

Had your Lot fallen here, O what unhappy Men and Women had you been, notwithstanding the natural amenity and pleasantness of your native soil? You had then adored a grand Impostor, and died in a Fool's Paradise. Instead of God's lively Oracles, you had been (as they now are) deceived to your eternal ruin with such fond, mad and wild dreams, as who so considers would think, the *Authors* had more need of manacles and fetters, than arguments or sober answers.

(3.) Or if neither of these had been your Lot, but you had been emptied by the Womb of Nature into this little spot of the Earth which is *Christianized* by profession, but nevertheless for the most part over-run by *Popish Idolatry*, and *Antichristian* delusions; what unhappy Men and Women had you been, had you suck'd a Popish Breast?

Breast? For this people are to be the subjects of the Vials of God's wrath to be poured out successively upon them, as you may read, *Rev.* 16. and the Scriptures in round and plain Language tell, what their fate must be, *2 Thess.* 2. 11, 12. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they shall believe a lye, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Nay, you might have fallen into the same Land in which your habitation now is, and yet have had no advantage by it as to salvations, if he that chose the bounds of your habitations, had not also graciously determined the times for you, *Acts* 17. 26. For,

(4.) Suppose your Lot had fallen where it is during the *Pagan State of England*, who for many hundred years were gross and vile Idolaters. Thick darkness over-spread the people of this Island, and as in other Countreys, the Devil was worshiped, and his lying Oracles zealously attended upon.

The shaking of the top of *Jupiter's Oak* in *Dodona*, the Caldron smitten with the rod in the hand of *Jupiter's Image*, the *Lawrel and Fountain* in *Daphne*: these were the Ordinances on which the poor deluded Wretches waited. So in this Nation they worshipped Idols also: the Sun and Moon were adored for Gods, with many other abominable Idols which our Ancestors worshipped, and whose memorials are not to this day quite obliterated among us. vide Ver-
stigan's
British
Antiqui-
ties.

(5.) Or suppose our Lot had fallen in those later miserable days, in which *Queen Mary* sent so many hundreds to Heaven in a fiery Chariot, and the poor Protestants skulked up and down in

holes and woods, to preserve them from *Papish Inquisitors*, who like Blood-hounds, hunted up and down through all the Cities, Towns and Villages of the Nation, to seek out the poor sheep of Christ for a prey.

But such hath the special care of Providence towards us been, that our turn to be brought up on the stage of this World was graciously reserv'd for better days: so that if we had our own option, we could not have chosen for our selves, as Providence hath. We are not only furnish'd with the best room in this great house; but before we were put into it, it was swept with the besom of National Reformation, from *Idolatry*, yea, and washed by the blood of *Martyrs* from *Popish* filthiness; and adorn'd with Gospel-lights, shining in as great lustre in our days, as ever they did since the *Apostles* days. You might have been born in *England* for many Ages, and not have found a *Christian* in it: yea, and since *Christianity* was here own'd, and not have met a *Protestant* in it. O what an obligation hath Providence laid you under, by such a merciful performance as this for you?

Obj.

If you say, *All this indeed is true; but what is this to eternal salvation; do not multitudes that enjoy these privileges, eternally perish notwithstanding them? yea, and perish with an aggravation of sin and misery beyond other sinners?*

Sal.

True, they do so; and it is of very sad consideration that it should be so; but yet we cannot deny this to be a very choice and singular Mercy, to be born in such a Land, and at such a time. For let us consider what helps for salvation men here enjoy, beyond what they could enjoy, had their Lot fall'n according to the fore-mention'd suppositions.

(1.) Here

(1.) Here we enjoy the ordinary means of salvation, which elsewhere Men are denied and cut off from. So that if any among the *Heathens* be saved and brought to *Christ*, it must be in some miraculous or extraordinary way: for, *How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a Preacher?* Rom. 10. 14. Alas! were there a desire awakened in any of their hearts after a Gospel discovery of salvation, (which ordinarily is not, nor can be rationally supposed) yet poor Creatures, they might travel from Sea to Sea, to hear the Word, and not find it: Whereas you can hardly miss the opportunities of hearing the Gospel: Sermons meet you frequently, so that you can scarcely shun or avoid the Ordinances and Instruments of your Salvation. And is this nothing? Christ even forces himself upon us,

(2.) Here in this Age of the World, the common prejudices against Christianity are removed, by the advantage it hath of a publick profession among the people and protection by the Laws of the Country. Whereas, were your habitation among *Jews*, *Mahometans*, or *Heathen Idolaters*, you would find *Christ* and *Christianity* the common odium of the Country; every one defying and deriding both name and thing; and such your selves likely had been, if your birth and education had been among them. For you may observe, that whatever is *πατερπαραδοτον* traditionally delivered down from Father to Son, every one is fond of, and zealous in its defence. The *Jews*, *Heathens* and *Mahometans* are at this day so tenacious of their Errors, that with Spitting, Hissing, and Clapping of Hands, and all other Signs of Indignation and Abhorrence they chase away all others from among them. D 4 Is

Is it not then a special Mercy to you to be cast into such a Countrey and Age, where (as *Mr. Pinke* learned Divine observes) the true Religion hath the same advantages over every false one, as in other Countreys they have over it? Here you have the presence of precious Means, and the absence of Soul-destroying Prejudices, two signal Mercies.

(3.) Here, in this Age of the World, Christianity bespeaks you as soon as you are capable of any sense, or impressions of Religion upon you? and so by an happy *Anticipation*, blocks up the passages, by which a false Religion would else certainly enter. Here you suck in the first notions and principles of Christianity, even with the Mother's milk: and certainly, such a prepossession is a choice advantage. *Quo semel est imbuta, recens servabit odorem testa diu.* Train up a Child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it, Prov. 22. 6.

(4.) Here you have, or may have the help and assistance of Christians to direct your way, resolve your doubts, support your burthens, and help you through those difficulties that attend the new birth. Alas! if a poor Soul had any beginnings or faint workings and stirrings after Christ and true Religion in many other Countreys, the hand of every Man would presently be against him, and none would be found to relieve, assist or encourage, as you may see in that Example of *Galeacius*; the nearest relations would, in that case, prove the greatest Enemies, the Countrey would quickly hoot at him as a Monster, and cry, Away with the *Heretick* to the Prison or Stake.

Whether these eventually prove blessings to your Souls or no, certain I am, that in themselves

selves they are singular Mercies, and helps to salvation, that are denied to Millions besides you. So that if *Plato* when he was near his death, could bless God for three things, *viz.* That he was a Man and not a Beast: that he was born in *Greece*; and brought up in the time of *Socrates*: much more cause have you to admire Providence, that you are Men and not Beasts; that you were born in *England*, and brought up in Gospel-days here. This is a Land the Lord hath espied for you, as the expression is, *Ezek. 20. 6.* and concerning it, you have abundant cause to say, as in another case the *Psalmist* doth, *Psal. 16. 6.* *The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage.*

The Third Performance of Providence.

III.

The next observable Performance of Providence, which must be heedfully adverted and weighed, is the *tial* *Per-* designation of the stock and family out of which we ^{performances} should spring and rise. And truly, this is of spe- ^{with re-} cial consideration, both as to our temporal and ^{spect to} eternal good: for whether the Families in which ^{the Stock} we grew up, were great or small in *Israel*; whe- ^{and Fami-} ther our parents were of a higher or lower *Class*, ^{ly out of} and rank among men, yet if they were such as ^{which we} feared God and wrought righteousness, if they took any care to educate you religiously, and trained you up *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, you are bound to reckon it among your chief Mercies, that you sprung from the loins of such parents: for from this Spring a double stream of Mercy rises to you.

(1.) Temporal and external Mercies to your outward man. You cannot but know, that as Godliness entails a blessing, so wickedness and un-

unrighteousness a curse upon posterity. An instance of the former you have in *Gen. 17. 18, 20.* On the contrary, you have the threatening, *Zech. 5. 4.* and both together, *Prov. 3. 33.* *The Curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but he bleisseth the Habitation of the just.* True it is, that both these imply the Childrens treading in the steps of their Parents, according to *Ezek. 18.* but how frequently is it seen, that wicked men breed their children vainly and wickedly; so that as it's said of *Abijam, 1 Kings 15. 3.* *He walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him;* and so the curse is entail'd from generation to generation. To escape this Curse, is a choice Providence.

(2.) But especially take notice, what a stream of *spiritual Blessings* and Mercies flows from this Providence to the inner man. O its no common Mercy, to descend from pious Parents: Some of us do not only owe our natural life to them, as Instruments of our Beings, but our spiritual and eternal Life also. It was no small Mercy to *Timothy*, to be descended from such Progenitors, *2 Tim. 1. 5.* nor to *Augustine*, that he had such a Mother as *Monica*, who planted in his mind the precepts of life with her Words, watered them with her Tears, and nourished them with her Example. We will a little more particularly inspect this Mercy, and in so doing, we shall find manifold Mercies contained in it.

(1.) What a Mercy was it to us, to have Parents that prayed for us before they had us, as well as in our Infancy, when we could not pray for our selves? Thus did *Abraham, Gen. 15. 2.* and *Hannah, 1 Sam. 1. 10, 11.* and some here likely are the fruits and returns of their Parents Prayers. This was that holy course they continued

continued all their days for you, carrying all your Concerns, especially your eternal ones before the Lord with their own; and pouring out their Souls to God so affectionately for you, when their eye-strings and heart-strings were breaking. Oh put a value upon such Mercies; for they are precious. It's a greater Mercy, to descend from praying Parents, than from the loyns of Nobles. See *Job's* pious practice, *Job* 1. 5.

(2.) What a special Mercy was it to us, to have the excrescencies of corruption nipt in the bud by their pious and careful discipline? We now understand, what a critical and dangerous season Youth is, the wonderful proclivity of that Age to every thing that is evil. Why else are they called Youthful Lusts? *2 Tim.* 2. 22. When *David* asketh, *Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?* it's plainly enough implied in the very Question, that the way he takes lieth through the pollutions of the World in his youth, *Psal.* 119. 9. When you find a *David* praying, that God would not remember the sins of his youth, *Psal.* 25. 7. and a *Job* bitterly complaining, that God made him to possess the sins of his youth, *Job* 13. 26. sure you cannot but reflect, with a very thankful heart, upon those happy means, by which the corruption of your nature was happily prevented, or restrained in your Youth.

(3.) And how great a Mercy was it, that we had Parents, who carefully instilled the good Knowledge of God into our Souls in our tender Years? How careful was *Abraham* of this Duty? *Gen.* 18. 19. And *David*, *1 Chron.* 28. 9. We have some of us had Parents, who might say to us, as the *Apostle*, *Gal.* 4. 19. *My little Children, of whom I travel again in Birth till Christ be formed in you,*
As

As they longed for us before they had us, and rejoiced in us when they had us; so they could not endure to think, that when they could have us no more, the Devil should. As they thought no Pains, Care or Cost too much for our Bodies to feed them, cloath and heal them; so did they think no Prayers, Counsels or Tears, too much for our Souls, that they might be saved. They knew a parting Time would come betwixt them and us, and did strive to make it as easie and comfortable to them as they could, by leaving us in *Christ*, and within the blessed Bond of his Covenant.

They were not glad that we had Health, and indifferent whether we had Grace.

They as sensibly felt the Miseries of our Souls as of our Bodies; and nothing was more desirable to them, than that they might say in the great Day, Lord, here am I, and the Children which thou hast given me.

(4.) And was it not a special Favour to us, to have *Parents* that went before us as Patterns of Holiness, and beat the Path to Heaven for us by their Examples? Who could say to us, as *Phil. 4. 9. What things ye have heard and seen in me, that do;* and as *I Cor. 11. 1. Be ye followers of us, as we are of Christ.* The Parent's Life is the Child's Copy. O'tis no common Mercy, to have a fair Copy set before us, especially in the moulding age: We saw what they did, as well as heard what they said. It was *Abraham's* Commendation, that he commanded his Children, and his Household *after him*, to keep the way of the Lord. And such Mercies some of us have had also.

Ah my Friends, let me beg you, that you will set special Remarks upon this Providence, which
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so graciously wrought for you : And that your Hearts may be more thoroughly warmed in the Sense of it, compare your Condition with others, and seriously bethink your selves,

(1.) How many Children there be among us, that are drawn headlong to Hell by their cruel and ungodly Parents, who teach them to curse and swear as soon as they can speak ? Many Families there are, wherein little other Language is heard, but what is the Dialect of Hell. These, like the old Logs and small Spray, are preparing for the Fire of Hell, where they must burn together. Of such Children, that Scripture, *Psalms* 49. 19. will one day be verified, except they repent, *They shall go to the Generation of their Fathers, where they shall not see Light.*

(2.) And how many Families are there, though not so prophane, who yet breed up their Children vainly and sensually, as *Job* 21. 11, &c. take no care what becomes of their Souls, so they can but provide for their Bodies ? If they can but teach them to carry their Bodies, no matter if the Devil act their Souls : If they can but leave them Lands or Moneys, they think they have very fully discharged their Duties. O what will the Language be, wherewith such Parents and Children shall greet each other at the Judgment-Seat, and in Hell for ever ?

(3.) And how many be there, who are more sober, and yet hate the least appearances of Godliness in their Children ? Who instead of cherishing, do all that they can to break bruised Reeds, and quench smoking Flax, to stifle and strangle the first appearances and offers they make towards Christ ? Who had rather accompany them to their Graves, than to Christ, doing all that in them

them lies, *Herod* like, to kill *Christ* in the *Cradle*? Ah Sirs, ye little know, what a Mercy ye do or have enjoyed in Godly Parents, and what a good Lot Providence cast for you in this Concernment of your Bodies and Souls.

Object. If any shall say, *This was not their Case, they had little help Heaven-ward from their Parents:* To such I shall only reply three things.

Sol. (1.) If you had little furtherance, yet own it as a special Providence, that you had no hindrance; or, if you had Opposition, yet,

(2.) Admire the Grace of God, in plucking you out by a wonderful distinguishing Hand of Mercy from among them, and keeping alive the languishing sparks of Grace amidst the floods of opposition.

(3.) And learn from hence, if God give you a Posterity of your own, to be so much the more strict and careful of Relational Duties, by how much you have sensibly felt the want of it in your selves.

But seeing such a Train of Blessings, both as to this Life, and that to come, follow upon an holy Education of Children; I will not dismiss the Point, till I have discharged my Duty, in exhorting Parents and Children to their Duties.

And first for you that are *Parents*, or to whom the Education of Children is committed, I beseech you mind how concerning a Duty lies on you: And that I may effectually press it, consider,

(1.) How near the Relation is betwixt you and your Children, and therefore how much you are concerned in their Happiness or Misery. Consider but the Scripture account of the dearness of such Relations, expressed, (1.) By longings for them, as *Gen. 15. 2. Gen. 30. 1.* And, (2.) By our Joy when we have them, as *Christ* expresses it,

The Mystery of Providence.

51

it, *John* 16. 21. (3.) The high value set on them, *Gen.* 42. 38. (4.) The sympathy with them in all their troubles, *Mark* 9. 22. And, (5.) By our Sorrow at parting, *Gen.* 37. 35. (Now shall all this be to no purpose? For to what purpose do we desire them before we have them, rejoice in them when we have them, value them so highly, sympathize with them so tenderly, grieve for their Death so excessively; if in the mean time no Care be taken what shall become of them to Eternity?)

(2.) How God hath charged you with their Souls, as well as Bodies: And this appears by two sorts of Precepts. (1.) Precepts directly laid upon you, *Deut.* 6. 6, 7. and *Eph.* 6. 4. (2.) By Precepts laid on them to obey you, *Eph.* 6. 1. which plainly implies your Duty, as well as expresses theirs.

(3.) What shall comfort you at the parting time, if they die through your neglect in a Christless Condition? Oh this is the cutting Consideration, *My Child is in Hell*, and I did nothing to prevent it; I helped him thither. Duty discharged, is the only root of Comfort in that Day.

(4.) If you neglect to instruct them in the way of *Holiness*, will the Devil neglect to instruct them in the way of *Wickedness*? No, no, if you will not teach them to *Pray*, he will to *Curse*, *Swear* and *Lye*. If ground be uncultivated, weeds will spring.

(5.) If the Season of their Youth be neglected, how little probability is there of any good Fruit afterwards? That is the Moulding Age, *Prov.* 22. 6. How few are converted in Old Age? A twig is brought to any form, but grown Limbs will not bow.

(6.) You

(6.) You are instrumental Causes of all their spiritual Misery; and that, (1.) By *Generation*, (2.) *Imitation*: They lie spiritually dead of the Plague which you brought home among them, *Psalms 51. 5. Behold, I was shapen in Iniquity, and in Sin did my Mother conceive (or warm) me.*

(7.) There's none in the World so likely as you, to be Instruments of their eternal good. You have peculiar Advantages that none other hath; as, (1.) The interest you have in their Affections. (2.) Your opportunities to instil the Knowledge of Christ into them, being daily with them, *Deut. 6. 7.* (3.) Your Knowledge of their Tempers: If therefore you neglect, who shall help them?

(8.) The Consideration of the great Day, should move your Bowels of Pity for them. O remember that Text, *Rev. 20. 12, &c. I saw the dead small and great stand before God.* What a sad thing will it be, to see your dear Children at Christ's left Hand? O Friends, do your utmost to prevent this Misery. *Knowing the Terrors of the Lord, we perswade Men.*

2. And you Children, especially you that sprang from religious Parents, I beseech you, obey their Counsels; and tread in the steps of their pious Examples. To press this, I offer these Considerations.

(1.) Your disobedience to them, is a resisting of God's Authority, *Ephes. 6. 1. Children, obey your Parents in the Lord*: There's the Command: Your Rebellion therefore runs higher than you think. It is not Man, but God that you disobey; and for your disobedience God will punish you. It may be, their tenderness will not suffer them, or you are grown beyond their Correction: All they

they can do, is to complain to God; and if so, he will handle you more severely than they could do.

(2.) Your Sin is greater than the Sin of young Heathens and Infidels; and so will your Account be also. O better (if a wicked Child) that thou hadst been the off-spring of Salvage Indians, nay, of Beasts, than of such Parents. So many Counsels disobeyed, Hopes and Prayers frustrated, will turn to sad Aggravations.

(3.) It's usual with God, to retaliate Mens disobedience to their Parents in kind: Commonly our own Children shall pay us home for it. I have read in a grave Author, of a wicked Wretch that drag'd his Father along the House: The Father beg'd him, not to draw him beyond such a Place, for, said he, I drag'd my Father no farther. O the sad, but just Retributions of God!

And for you, in whose Hearts Grace hath been planted, by the Blessing of Education, I beseech you to admire God's Goodness to you in this Providence. Oh what an happy Lot hath God cast for you! How few Children are Partakers of your Mercies?

See that you honour such Parents; the tie is double upon you so to do. Be you the Joy of their Hearts, and Comfort of their Lives, if living: If not, yet still remember the Mercy while you live, and tread in their pious Paths; that you and they may both rejoice together in the great Day, and bless God for each other to all Eternity.

The Fourth Performance of Providence.

IV.

Providen-

The next remarkable Performance of Providence for the People of God, in which I will instance, shall be with respect to its ordering the Occasions, Instruments and Means of their Conversion.

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In to God.

* Gen.
48. 3.

In nothing doth *Providence* shine forth more gloriously in this World, than it doth in this Performance for the People of God. How curiously soever its hand had molded your Bodies, how tenderly soever it had preserved them, and how bountifully soever it had provided for them; it had not also order'd some means or other for your Conversion, all the former Favours and Benefits it had done for you, had signified little. This, O this is the most excellent Benefit you ever received from its hand. You are more beholden to it for this than for all your other Mercies. And in opening this Performance of Providence, I cannot but think your Hearts must be deeply affected. This is a Subject which every gracious Heart loves to steep its Thoughts in. It's certainly the sweetest History that ever they repeated: They love to think and talk of it. The Places where, and Instruments by whom this Work was wrought, are exceedingly endeared to them for the Works sake: Yea, endeared to that Degree, that for many Years after their Hearts have melted, when they have but passed occasionally by those Places, or but seen the Faces of those Persons, that were used as Instruments in the Hand of Providence for their good. As no doubt but * *Jacob's Beth-el* was ever after that Night sweet to his Thoughts: So other Saints have had their *Bethels* as well as he. O blessed Places, Times and Instruments! O the deep, the sweet Impressions, never to be razed out of the Memory or Heart, that this Providence had made upon those on whom it wrought this blessed Effect at Years of Discretion, and in a more sensible way!

But lest any poor Soul should be discouraged

under

under the Display of this Providence, because he cannot remember the Time, Place, Instruments and Manner wherein, and by which Conversion-work was wrought; I will therefore premise this necessary Distinction, to prevent injury to some, whilst I design Benefit to others.

Conversion, as to the Subjects of it, may be considered two ways; either as it is more sensibly wrought in Persons of riper Years, who in their youthful Days were more profane and vile; or upon Persons in their tender Years, into whose Hearts Grace was more insensibly and undiscernably instill'd by God's Blessings upon pious Education. In the former sort, the distinct Acts of the Spirit, as *illuminating, convincing, humbling, drawing them to Christ, and sealing them*, are more evident and discernable: In the latter, more obscure and confused; they can remember, that God gave them an Esteem and Liking of godly Persons, Care of Duty, and Conscience of Sin; but as to the Time, Place, Instruments and Manner of the Work, they can give but a slender Account of them: However, if the Work be savingly wrought in them, there is no Reason they should be troubled, because the Circumstances of it are not so evident to them as they are to others. Let the Substance and Reality of the Work appear, and there is no Reason to afflict your selves, because of the Inevidence of such Circumstances.

But yet where the Circumstances as well as Substance are clear to a Man: When we can call to remembrance the Time when, the Place where, the Instrument by whom, that Work was wrought, it must needs be exceeding sweet: And they cannot but yield a fresh Delight to the Soul every time they are reflected upon.

There are many of the following Occasions, which it may be, we took for *Straglers* when they first beset us: But they proved *Scouts* sent out from the main Body of Providence, which they make way for.

Now there be divers Things in those Providences, that are versant about this Work, which are exceeding sweet and taking; as namely,

1. The wonderful *Strangeness* and *Unaccountableness* of this Work of Providence, in casting us into the way, and ordering the Occasions, yea, the minutest Circumstances about this Work. Thus you find in *Acts* 8. 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, &c. The *Eunuch* at that very instant when he was reading the Prophet *Isaiah*, hath an Interpreter, one among a Thousand, that joins his *Chariot*, just as his Mind was by a fit Occasion prepared to receive the first Light of the Knowledge of *Christ*.

And how strange was that Change (how far soever it went) upon *Naaman* the Syrian? recorded *2 Kings* 5. 1, 2, 3, 4. That the *Syrians* in their Incurſion should bring away this Girl, (likely her Beauty was the Inducement) and she must be presented to *Naaman's* Wife, and relate to her the Power of God that accompanied the Prophet; though you find in that particular Case there had never been an Instance given before, *Luke* 4. 27. Doubtless, the whole of this Affair was guided by the signal Direction of Providence.

So for the Conversion of the *Samaritans*, it's observed *John* 4. 4. Christ must needs go that way, (*i.e.*) it lay just in the Road betwixt *Judea* and *Galilee*, and at the sixth Hour (*i.e.*) high Noon, he rests himself upon *Jacob's* Well, still seeming to have no other Design, but his own

Refreshment, by sitting and drinking there : But O what a Train of blessed Providences follow this, which seemed but an accidental thing ! first the Woman of *Samaria*, and then many more in that City are brought to believe in *Christ*, as you find *Verse 29.* and *41.*

It is noted by *Melchior Adams*, in the Life of *Junius*, how very an Atheist he was grown in his younger Years ; but in order to his Conversion to God, first, a wonderful Preservation of his Life, in a publick Tumult at *Lyons* in *France* must make way, which forces from him the Acknowledgment of a Deity. Then his Father sends for him home, and with much Gentleness persuades him to read the Scriptures ; he lights upon the *first* of *John*, and with it he sensibly feels a Divine Supernatural Majesty and Power seizing his Soul, which brought him over by a compleat Conversion to *Jesus Christ*. Thus, as the Woman of *Tekoa* told *David*, *doth God devise Means to bring back his banished.*

Melch.
Adams
Vitæ
Theol.
Part 2.
p. 194.

Lawater tells us, that many *Spanish* Souldiers, going into the Wars of *Germany*, were there Converted to *Christ*, by falling into the Cities and Towns, where Godly Ministers and Christians were.

Mr. Robert Bolton, though an excellent Scholar, yet in his younger Years he was a very irreligious Person, and a Jeerer of Holy Men ; but being cast into the Company of Godly *Mr. Peacock*, was by him brought to Repentance, and proved a famous Instrument in the Church of *Christ*.

A Scrap of Paper accidentally coming to view, hath been used as an occasion of Conversion. This was the Case of a Minister of *Wales*, who had two Livings, but took little care of either.

See Fir-
min's Re-
al Chri-
stian, p.
119.

He being at a Fair bought something at a Pedlar's Standing, and rent off a Leaf of *Mrs Perkins's* Catechism to wrap it in, and reading a Line or two in it, God set it home, so as it did the Work.

The Marriage of a Godly Man into a carnal Family, hath been order'd by Providence, for the Conversion and Salvation of many therein. Thus we read, in the Life of that Renowned *English* Worthy *Mr. John Bruen*, that in his second Match it was agreed, that he should have one Years Diet in his Mother-in-law's House: During his abode there that Year (saith *Mr. Clark*) the Lord was pleased by his means graciously to work upon her Soul, as also upon his Wife's Sister, and half Sister, their Brothers *Mr. William* and *Thomas Fox*, with one or two of the Servants in that Family.

Sleyden's
Comment, p.
476.

The Reading of a good Book, hath been the Means of bringing others to Christ. And thus we find many of the *German* Divines converted, by reading *Luther's* Books: Yea, and what is more strange, *Mr. Sleyden* in his Commentary tells us, that *Vergerius*, though he were present an Eye and Ear-witness to that doleful Case of *Spirax*, which one would think should move a Stone, yet still continu'd so firm to the *Pope's* Interest, that when he fell into some Suspicion among the *Cardinals*, he resolved to purge himself, by writing a Book against the *German Apostates*: But whilst he read the *Protestant* Books, out of no other Design but to confute them; whilst he is weighing the Arguments, is himself convinc'd and brought to Christ. He finding himself thus overcome by the Truth, imparts his Conviction to his Brother, a zealous *Papist* also: This Brother deplores the misery of his Case; and seeks to reclaim him;

but *Vergerius* entreating him to weigh well the Protestant Arguments, he also yields; and so both immediately betook themselves to preach Justification by the Free Grace of God through the Blood of Christ.

Yea, not only the reading of a Book, or hearing a Minister, but (which is most remarkable) the very Mistake or Forgetfulness of a Minister, hath been improv'd by Providence for this End and Purpose. *Augustine* once Preaching to his Congregation, forgot the Argument which first he propos'd, and fell upon the Error of the *Manichees*, beside his first Intention: By which Discourse he converted one *Firmus* his Auditor; who fell down at his Feet weeping, and confessing he had lived a *Manichee* many Years. Another I knew, who going to Preach, took up another Bible than that he design'd, in which, not only missing his Notes, but the Chapter also in which his Text lay, was put to some loss thereby: But after a short Pause, he resolv'd to speak to any other Scripture that might be presented to him, and accordingly read that Text, 2 Pet. 3.9. *The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, &c.* And though he had nothing prepar'd; yet the Lord help'd him to speak both methodically and pertinently from it: By which Discourse, a gracious Change was wrought upon one in the Congregation, who hath since given good Evidence of a sound Conversion, and acknowledg'd this Sermon to be the first and only Means thereof.

Possidoni-
us in vita
Augustini
cap. 15.

The accompanying of others in a neighbourly civil Visit, hath been over-rul'd to the same end. Thus many of the *Jews* accompanied *Mary* into *Bethany*, (designing only to manifest their civil Respect) but there they met Christ, saw the

Things which he did, and believed on him,
John II. 45.

Mr. *Firmin*, in his *Real Christian*, Page 97, 98, tells us of one who had liv'd many Years in a Town where *Christ* had been as clearly and as long preach'd as in any Town in *England*. This Man when he was about seventy six Years of Age, went to visit a sick Neighbour. "A Christian Friend of mine (saith mine Author) came to see him also, and finding this Old Man there; whom he judged to be one that liv'd upon his own Stock, Civility, good Works, &c. he purposely fell into that Discourse, to shew how many Persons lived upon their Duties, but never came to *Christ*. The Old Man sitting by the Bed side, heard him; and God was pleased to convince him that he was such a Person, who had lived upon himself without *Christ* to that Day; and would say afterwards, had I died before threescore and sixteen, I had perish'd, for I knew not *Christ*.

The committing of a Godly Man to *Prison*, hath been the Method of Providence, to save the Soul of a poor Keeper. So *Paul*, *Acts* 16. 27. was made a *Prisoner*, to make his Keeper a spiritual *Free-man*. The like Success had *Dr. Barns* in *Queen Mary's Days*, who afterwards celebrated the *Lord's Supper* in *Prison* with his converted Keeper.

The Scattering of *Ministers* and *Christians* by Persecution from *Cities* and *Towns*, into the ignorant and barbarous Parts of the Country, hath been the way of Providence, to find out and bring home some lost Sheep that were found there, to *Jesus Christ*, *Acts* 8. 1, 4. The like signal Event hath since follow'd upon the like scattering of
Godly

Godly *Ministers*, whereof are many pregnant Instances at this Day.

A *Servant* running away from his Master, (likely upon no other Design but to live an idle Life) yet falling into such Places and Companies as Providence order'd (in a Design to him unknown) hath thereby been brought to be the Servant of *Christ*. This was the very Case of *Onesimus*, who run away from his Master *Philemon* to *Rome*; where by a strange Providence (possibly a meer Curiosity to see the Prisoners) he there falls into *Paul's* Hands, who begat him to *Christ* in his Bonds, *Philemon*, ver. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

Going to hear a Sermon in Jest, hath prov'd some Mens Conversion in earnest. The above-named Mr. *Firmin*, in the fore-cited Book, tells us of a notorious *Drunkard*, whom the Drunkards call'd *Father*, that one Day would needs go to hear what *Wilson* said, out of no other Design, it seems, but to scoff at that Holy Man: But in the Prayer before Sermon, his Heart began to thaw; and when he read his Text, which was *John* 5. 14. *Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee*: He could not contain; and in that Sermon the Lord changed his Heart, though so bitter an Enemy, that the Minister, on Lecture-days, was afraid to go to Church before his Shop-door. *Lo these are Parts of his Ways, but how small a Portion is known of him?*

The dropping of some grave and weighty Word accidentally, in the presence of vain carnal Persons, the Death of an Husband, Wife, or Child, a Fit of Sickness, with a thousand other such like Occasions, have been thus improved by Providence to the Conversion of Souls.

And no less remarkable and wonderful are the
De-

Designs of Providence, in ordering the *Removes*, and governing the *Motions* of Ministers, from Place to Place, in order unto the Conversion of Souls. Thus oftentimes it carries them to Places where they intended not to go; God having (unknown to them) some elect Vessels there, who must be called by the Gospel.

Thus *Paul* and *Timothy*, (a sweet and lovely Pair) when they were Travelling through *Phrygia* and *Galatia*, were forbid to Preach the Word in *Asia*, to which probably their Minds inclined, *Acts* 16. 6. And when they essayed to go into *Bythinia*, the Spirit suffer'd them not, *Verse* 7. But a Man of *Macedonia* (i. e.) an Angel in the Shape or Habit of a Man of that Country) appeared to *Paul* in a Vision, and prayed him, saying, *Come over into Macedonia, and help us*, ver. 9. and there did God open the Heart of *Lydia*.

I knew a pious Minister now with God, who falling in his Study upon a very rousing Subject, intended for his own Congregation, was strongly moved, when he had finished it, to go to a rude, vile, prophane People, about five Miles off, and first preach it to them; after many Wrestlings with himself, not being willing to quench any Motion that might be suppos'd to come from the Spirit of God, he obeyed, and went to this People, who had then no Minister of their own, and few durst come among them. And there did the Lord, beyond all Expectation, open a Door, and several prophane ones received *Christ* in that Place, and engaged this Minister to a Weekly Lecture among them, in which were many Souls won to God.

The same holy Man, at another time, being upon a Journey, passed by a Company of vain Persons,

Persons, who were wrestling upon a Green near the Road : And just as he came against the Place, one of them had thrown his *Antagonist*, and stood Triumphant in his Strength and Activity. This good Man rode up to them, and turning his Speech to this Person, told him, Friend, I see you are a strong Man; but yet let not the strong Man glory in his Strength : You must know that you are not to wrestle with Flesh and Blood, but with Principalities and Powers, and Spiritual Wickednesses : How sad will it be, that *Satan* should at last trip up the Heels of your Hope, and give you an eternal Overthrow ? And after about a quarter of an Hours serious Discourse upon this Subject, he left them, and went on his Journey ; but this Discourse made such an Impression, that the Person had no Rest, till he open'd his trouble to a godly Minister, who wisely following the Work upon his Soul, saw at last the blessed Issue thereof in the gracious Change of the Person, whereof he afterwards gave the Minister a joyful Account. O how unsearchable are the Methods of Providence in this Matter ?

Nay, what is yet more wonderful, the Providence of God hath sometimes ordered the very Malice of *Satan*, and Wickedness of Men, as an Occasion of eternal Good to their Souls. A very memorable Example whereof, I shall here give the Reader, faithfully relating what not many Years past fell out in my own Observation in this place, to the Astonishment of many Spectators.

In the Year 1673. there came in this Port a Ship of *Poole*, in her Return from *Virginia* ; in which Ship was one of that place, a lusty young man of twenty three years of age, who was *Chirurgian* in the Ship. This Person in the Voyage fell

fell into a deep Melancholy, which the Devil greatly improv'd to serve his own Design for the Ruin of this poor Man; however it pleased the Lord to restrain him from any Attempts upon his own Life, until he arrived here. But shortly after his Arrival, upon the Lord's Day early in the Morning (being in Bed with his Brother) he took a Knife prepar'd for that purpose, and cut his own Throat, and withal leap'd out of the Bed; and though the Wound was deep and large, yet thinking it might not soon enough dispatch his wretched Life, desperately thrust it into his Stomach, and so lay wallowing in his own Blood, till his Brother awaking made a cry for Help: Hereupon a *Physician* and a *Chirurgion* coming in, found the Wound in his Throat mortal; and all they could do at present was only to stitch it, and apply a Plaister, with design rather to enable him to speak for a little while than with any Expectation of Cure; for before that, he breathed through the Wound, and his Voice was inarticulate.

In this Condition I found him that Morning, and apprehending him to be within a few Minutes of Eternity, I laboured to work upon his Heart the sense of his Condition, telling him, I had but little time to do any thing for him, and therefore desired him to let me know what his own Apprehensions of his present Condition were: He told me, he hoped in God for eternal Life; I replied, that I fear'd his Hopes were ungrounded, for that the Scripture tells us, *No Murderer bath eternal Life abiding in him*, but this was Self murder, the grossest of all Murthers: and insisting upon the Aggravation and Heinousness of the Fact, I perceived his vain Confidence be-

gan to fall, and some meltings of Heart appear'd in him. He then began to lament with many Tears his Sin and Misery, and asked me, if there might yet be Hope for one that had destroyed himself, and shed his own Blood. I replied, the Sin indeed is great, but not unpardonable; and if the Lord gave him Repentance unto Life, and Faith to apply *Jesus Christ*, it should be certainly pardoned to him: and finding him unacquainted with these things, I open'd to him the Nature and Necessity of Faith and Repentance, which he greedily suckt in, and with great Vehemency cried to God, that he would work them upon his Soul, and intreated me also to pray with him and for him, that it might be so. I pray'd with him, and the Lord thawed his Heart exceedingly in that Duty: Loth he was to part with me; but the Duties of the Day necessitating me to leave him, I briefly summ'd up what was most necessary in my parting Counsel to him, and took my Leave, never expecting to see him more in this World. But beyond my own and all Men's Expectation, he continued all that Day, and pant-ed most ardently after *Jesus Christ*: No Discourses pleased him but *Christ* and Faith; and in this Frame I found him in the Evening. He rejoiced greatly to see me again, and entreated me to continue my Discourses upon these Subjects; and after all, told me, Sir, the Lord hath given me Repentance for this Sin; yea, and for every other Sin. I see the Evil of Sin now, so as I never saw it before. O! I loath my self; I am a vile Creature in my own Eyes. I do also believe: *Lord help my Unbelief*. I am heartily willing to take *Christ* upon his own Terms. One thing only troubles me, I doubt this bloody Sin will not be

be pardoned. Will Jesus Christ (said he) apply his Blood to me, that have shed my own Blood? I told him, Christ shed his Blood even for them that with wicked Hands had shed the Blood of Christ; and that was a Sin of deeper Guilt than his. Well, (saith he) I will cast my self upon Christ; let him do by me what he will. And so I parted with him that Night.

Next Morning the Wounds were to be open'd; and then, the Opinion of the *Chirurgeons* was, he would immediately expire.

Accordingly, at his Desire, I came that Morning, and found him in a most serious Frame. I prayed with him, and then the Wound in his Stomach was open'd, but by this Time the *Ventricle* it self was swoln out of the *Orifice* of the Wound, and lay like a livid discolour'd *Tripe* upon his Body, and was also cut through; so that all concluded, it was impossible for him to live? however they stich'd the Wound in the Stomach, enlarg'd the *Orifice*, and fomented it, and wrought it again into his Body, and so stitching up the Skin, left him to the dispose of Providence.

But so it was, that both the deep Wound in his Throat, and this in his Stomach healed; and the more dangerous Wound *Sin* had made upon his Soul, was, I trust, effectually healed also. I spent many Hours with him in that Sickness; and after his Return home, received this Account from Mr. *Samuel Hardy*, a Minister in that Town; Part whereof I shall transcribe.

Dear Sir,

I Was much troubled at the sad Providence in your Town; but did much rejoice, that he fell into such Hands for his Body and Soul. You have taken much
Pains

Pains with him, and I hope to good purpose. I think, if ever a great and thorough work were done such a way, it is now; and if ever the like, I am persuaded now it is. Never grow weary of such good works. One such Instance is (methinks) enough to make you to abound in the work of the Lord all your days, &c.

O how unsearchable are the Ways of Providence in leading Men to Christ! Let none be encouraged by this to sin, that Grace may abound. These are rare and singular Instances of the Mercy of God, and such as no presumptuous Sinner can expect to find. It's only recited here, to the Honour of Providence, which works for the recovery of Sinners in Ways that we understand not. O what a fetch hath Providence beyond our Understandings!

2. And as it orders very strange Occasions to awaken and rouze Souls at first, so it works no less wonderfully in carrying on the Work to perfection; and this it doth two ways:

(1.) By quickening and reviving dying Convictions and Troubles for Sin. Souls, after their first awakening, are apt to lose the Sense and Impression of their first Troubles for Sin; but Providence is vigilant to prevent it, and doth effectually prevent it sometimes, by directing the Minister to some discourse or passage, that shall fall as pat, as if the case of such a person had been studied by him, and designedly spoken to. How often have I found this in the cases of many Souls, who have professed they have stood amazed, to hear the very Thoughts of their Hearts discover'd by the Preacher, who knew nothing of them! Sometimes by directing them to some proper rousing Scripture, that suits their present Case; and some-

sometimes by suffering them to fall into some new Sin, which shall awaken all their former Troubles again, and put a new efficacy and activity into the Conscience. The World is full of Instances in all these Cases, and because most Christians have experience of these things in themselves, it will be needless to recite them here. Search but a few years back, and you may remember, that according to this Account, (at least in some particulars) Providence order'd the matter with you. Have you not found some Rod or other prepared by Providence, to rouse you out of your security? Why, this is so common a thing with Christians, that they many times presage an affliction coming from the Frames they find their own Hearts in.

(2.) It gives also great assistance to the work of the Spirit upon the Soul, by ordering, supporting, relieving and cheering means, to prop up and comfort the Soul, when it is over-burthened, and ready to sink in the deeps of troubles. I remember Mr. Bolton gives us one Instance, which fits both these cases, the *reviving of Convictions*, and *seasonable Supports in the Deeps of Troubles*. And it is of a Person that by Convictions had been fetcht off from his wicked Companions, and entered into a reformed Course of Life; but after this, through the Inticement of his old Companions, the Subtilty of Satan, and Corruption of his own Heart, did again relapse into the Ways of Sin. Then was providentially brought to his view that Scripture, *Prov. 1. 24, 25, 26, &c.* this renewed his Trouble; yea, aggravated it to a greater height than ever; insomuch that he could scarcely think (as it seems by the Relation) his Sin could be pardoned. But in this plunge, that

Text,

Text, *Luke 17. 4.* was presented to him, which sweetly settled him in a sure and glorious Peace.

Nor can we here forget that miraculous Work of Providence, in a time of great extremity, which was wrought for that good *Gentlewoman Mrs. Honeywood*, (and is somewhere mentioned by the same Author) who under a deep and sad desertion, refused and put off all Comfort, seeming to despair utterly of the Grace and Mercy of God. A worthy Minister being one day with her, and reasoning against her desperate Conclusions, she took a *Venice Glass* from the Table, and said, Sir, I am as sure to be damned, as this Glass is to be broken, and therewith threw it forcibly to the ground; but to the astonishment of both, the Glass remained whole and sound, which the Minister taking up with admiration, rebuked her Presumption, and shewed her what a Wonder Providence had wrought for her Satisfaction, and it greatly altered the Temper of her Mind. O how unsearchable are his Ways! and his Paths past finding out! Lo, these are part of his Ways; but how small a Portion do we know of him?

And now suffer me to expostulate a little with thy Soul, Reader. Hast thou been duly sensible of thy Obligation to Providence, for this inestimable Favour? O what hath it done for thee! there are divers kinds of Mercies conveyed to Men by the hand of Providence, but none like this; in all the Treasury of its Benefits, none is found like this. Did it cast thee into the way of Conversion, and order the means and occasions of it for thee, when thou little thoughtest of any such thing? How dear and sweet should the Remembrance of it be to thy Soul! Methinks it should astonish and melt you every time you re-

flect upon it. Such Mercies should never grow stale, or look like common things to you: for do but seriously consider the following Particulars.

1. How *surprizing* the Mercy was, which it performed for you in that day. Providence had a design upon you, for your eternal good, which you understood not. The Time of Mercy was now fully come; the Decree was now ready to bring forth that Mercy, with which it had gone big from Eternity, and its gracious Design must be executed by the Hand of Providence, so far as concerned the external Means and Instruments; and how aptly did it cause all things to fall in with that Design, tho' you knew not the Meaning of it? Look over all the before-mentioned Examples, and you shall see the blessed Work of Conversion begun upon those Souls, when they minded it no more than *Saul* did a Kingdom, that Morning he went out to seek his *Father's Asses*, 1 *Sam.* 9. 3, 20. Providence might truly have said to you in that Day, as *Christ* said to *Peter*, *John* 13. 7. *What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know it. God's Thoughts are not as our Thoughts; but as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are his Thoughts higher than ours, and his Ways than our Ways.* Little did *Zachew* think, when he climb'd up into the *Sycamore-tree*, to see *Christ* as he passed that way, what a design of Mercy *Christ* had upon him, who took thence the Occasion of becoming both his *Guest* and *Saviour*, *Luke* 19. 5, 6, 7, 8. And as little did some of you think, what the aim of Providence was, when you went (some out of Custom, others out of Curiosity, if not worse Ends) to hear such a Sermon. O how stupendious are the Ways of God!

2. What

The Mystery of Providence.

71

2. What a distinguishing and seasonable Mercy was usher'd in by Providence in that day. It brought you to the Means of Salvation in a good Hour. At that very nick of time, when the *Angel* troubled the Waters, you were brought to the *Pool*; to allude to that, *John 5. 4.* Now the accepted Day was come, the *Spirit* was in the Ordinance, or Providence that converted you, and you were set in the way of it. It may be, you had heard many hundred Sermons before, but nothing would stick till now, because the Hour was not come. The Lord did, as it were, call in the Word for such a Man, such a Woman; and Providence said, Lord, here he is, I have brought him before thee. There were many others under that Sermon, that received no such Mercy. You your selves had heard many before, but not to that advantage, as it is said, *Luke 4. 27.* *There were many Lepers in Israel in the Days of Elizeus, but to none of them was the Prophet sent, save unto Naaman the Syrian.* So there were many poor unconverted Souls beside you under the Word that day, and it may be, to none of them was Salvation sent that day, but to you. O blessed Providence, that set you in the way of Mercy at that time!

What a weighty and important Mercy was providentially directed to your Souls that Day. There are Mercies of all Sizes and Kinds in the Hands of Providence to dispense to the Sons of Men: its Left Hand is full of Blessings, as well as its Right. It hath Health and Riches, Honours and Pleasures, as well as Christ and Salvation, to dispense. The World is full of its *Left Hand* Favours; but the Blessings of its *Right Hand* are invaluablely precious, and few there be that receive them.

them. It doth thousands of kind Offices for Men; but among them all, this is the chiefest, to lead and direct them to Christ. For consider,

(1.) Of all Mercies, this comes through most and greatest Difficulties, *Eph. 1. 19, 20.*

(2.) This is a spiritual Mercy, excelling in Dignity of Nature all others, more than *Gold* excels the *Dirt* under your Feet, *Rev. 3. 18.* One such Gift is worth thousands of other Mercies.

(3.) This is a Mercy immediately flowing out of the Fountain of God's *electing Love*, a Mercy never dropt into any, but an Elect Vessel, *1 Thess. 1. 4, 5.*

(4.) This is a Mercy, that infallibly secures Salvation; for as we may argue from Conversion to Election, looking back; so from Conversion to Salvation, looking forward, *Heb. 6. 9.*

(5.) Lastly, This is an Eternal Mercy, that which will stick by you, when Father, Mother, Wife, Children, Estate, Honours, Health and Life shall fail thee, *John 4. 14.*

O therefore set a special Mark upon that Providence, that set you in the way of this Mercy. It hath performed that for thee, which all the Ministers on Earth and Angels in Heaven could never have performed. This is a Mercy, that puts weight and value into the smallest Circumstance that relates to it.

The Fifth Performance of Providence.

V.

Providential Performances with respect to our Civil Calling.

Thus you hear, how instrumental Providence hath been, in ordering the Means and Occasions of the greatest Mercies for your Souls. Let us now take into Consideration, another excellent Performance of Providence respecting the good of your Bodies and Souls too, *in respect of that*

that *Employment and Calling* it hath ordered for you in *this World*; for it hath not only an Eye upon your well being in the *World to come*, but upon your well being in *this World* also, and that very much depends upon the Station and Vocation to which it calls you.

Now the Providence of God with respect to our civil Callings, may be displayed very takingly in the following Particulars.

1. In directing you to a Calling in your Youth, and not suffering you to live an idle, useles and sinful Life, as many do, who are but Burthens to the Earth, *fruges consumere nati*, the Wens of the Body politick, serving only to disfigure and drein it, to eat what others earn. Sin brought in Sweat, *Gen. 3. 19.* but now, not to sweat increaseth Sin, *2 Theff. 3. 12.* He that lives idly, cannot live *honestly*; as is plainly enough intimated, *1 Theff. 4. 11, 12.* But when God puts Men into a lawful Calling, wherein the Labours of their Hands or Heads is sufficient for them, it is a very valuable Mercy: for thereby they *eat their own Bread*, *2 Theff. 3. 12.* Many a sad Temptation is happily prevented; and they are ordinarily furnished by it, for Works of Mercy to others, and surely it is more blessed to give, than to receive.

2. In ordering you to such *Callings* and *Employments* in the World, as are, not only lawful in themselves, but most *suitable* to you. There be many Persons imployed in *sinful* Trades and Arts, meerly to furnish other Mens Lusts: they do not only sin in their Employments; but their very Employments are sinful: they trade for Hell, and are Factors for the Devil. *Demetrius* and the Crafts-men at *Ephesus*, got their Estates by making

king Shrines for *Diana*, *Acts* 19. 24, 25. (i. e.) little Cases, or Boxes with folding Leaves, within which the *Image* of that *Idol* late enshrined. These were carried about by the People in Procession in Honour of their *Idol*. And at this Day, how many wicked Arts and Employments are there invented, (and Multitudes of Persons maintained by them) merely to gratifie the Pride and Wantonness of a debauched Age?

Now to have an honest lawful Employment wherein you do not dishonour God in benefiting your selves, is no small Mercy.

But if it be not only lawful in it self, but suited to your *Genius* and Strength, there is a double Mercy in it. Some poor Creatures are engaged in Callings, that eat up their time and strength, and make their Lives very uncomfortable to them : they have not only *spending* and wasting Employments in the World ; but such as allow them little or no time for their *general Calling* : and yet all this doth but keep them and theirs alive. Oh therefore, if God have fitted you with an honest Employment, wherein you have less toil than others, and more time for Heavenly Exercises, ascribe this Benefit to the special Care of Providence for you.

3. In settling you in such an *Employment* and *Calling* in the World, as possibly neither you selves nor *Parents* could ever expect you should arrive to. There are among us such Persons, as on this account are signally obliged to Divine Providence. God hath put them into such a way, as neither they nor their *Parents* ever projected. For look as the *Flower-de-luce* in the Compass turns now this way, then that way, and never ceases moving, till it settle to the *North-point* ; just so it

is in our Settlement in the World. A Child is now designed for this, then for that, but at last settles in that way of Employment which Providence designed him to. How strangely are things wheeled about by Providence! not what we, or our Parents, but what God designed shall take place. *Amos* was very meanly employed at first, but God designed him for a more honourable and comfortable Calling, *Amos* 7. 14, 15. *David* followed the Ewes, and likely never raised his thoughts to higher things in the days of his Youth; but God made him the Royal Shepherd of a better flock, *Psalms* 78. 70, 71. *Peter* and *Andrew* were employed as Fisher-men, but *Christ* calls them from that to an higher Calling, *Matth.* 4. 18, 19. to be Fishers of Men. *Pareus* when he was fourteen years old, was by the instigation of his Step-mother, placed with an *Apothecary*; but Providence so wrought, that he was taken off from that, and fitted for the Ministry; wherein he became a fruitful and eminent Instrument to the Church. *James Andreas* was by reason of his Father's inability to keep him at School, designed for a *Carpenter*; but was afterwards by the perswasion of friends, and assistance of the Church-stock sent to *Stutgard*, and thence to the University, and so arrived to a very eminent station of service to the Church. A master-builder, *Oecolampadius*, was by his Father designed for a Merchant; but his Mother by earnest entreaties, prevailed to keep him at School: and this Man was a blessed Instrument in the Reformation of Religion. I might easily cite Multitudes of such Instances; but a taste may suffice.

4. In securing your Estates from ruin, *Job* 1. 10. Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and all that

Divine Conduct : Or,

be hath? This is the Enclosure of Providence, which secures to us, what by its favour we acquire in the way of honest industry.

5. In making your Calling sufficient for you. It was the prayer of *Moses* for the Tribe of *Judah*, Deut. 33. 7. *Let his hands be sufficient for him*; and it is no small Mercy, if yours be so to you. Some there be that have work, but not strength to go through with it; others have strength, but no employment for it. Some have hands, and work for them; but it's not sufficient for them and theirs. If God bless your Labours, so as to give you and yours necessary supports and comfort in the World by it, it's a choice Providence, and withall thankfulness to be acknowledged.

Object. 1. If any that fear God shall complain, *That although they have a Calling, yet it is an hard laborious one, which takes up too much of their time, which they would gladly imploy in other, and better work.*
I answer,

Sol. (1.) It's like the Wisdom of Providence foresaw this to be the most suitable and proper Employment for you; and if you had more ease and rest, you might have more temptations than now you have: the strength and time which is now taken up in your daily labours, wherein you serve God, might otherways have been spent upon such lusts wherein you might have served the Devil.

(2.) Hereby it may be, your health is the better preserved, and natural Refreshments made the sweeter to you, Eccl. 5. 12. *The sleep of a labouring man is sweet to him, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*

(3.) And as to the service of God, if your hearts be spiritual, you may enjoy much Communion

munion with God in your very Employments, and you have some intervals and respits for that purpose. Have you not more spare hours, than you imploy to that end?

But all my labours will scarcely suffice, to procure me and mine the Necessaries of Life. I am kept short, and low to what others are; and this is a sad affliction. Object. 2:

Though the Wisdom of Providence hath ordered you a lower, and poorer condition than others, yet, (1.) Consider how many there be that are lower than you in the World: you have but little of the World, yet others have less. Read the description of those persons, *Job 30. 4, &c.* (2.) If God have given you but a small portion of the World; yet if you be godly, he hath promised never to forsake you, *Heb. 13. 5.* (3.) Providence hath ordered that condition for you, which is really best for your eternal good. If you had more of the World than you have, your heads and hearts might not be able to manage it to your advantage. A small Boat must have but a narrow Sail. You have not wanted hitherto the necessaries of life, and are commanded, *having food and rayment* (though none of the finest) *to be therewith content.* *A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked,* *Psal. 37. 16.* better in the Acquisition, sweeter in the Fruition, and more comfortable in the Account,

Well then, if Providence hath so disposed of you all, that you can eat your own bread, and so advantagiously directed some of you to employments, that afford not only necessaries for your selves and families, but an over-plus for works of Mercy to others, and all this brought about

about for you in a way you did not project ; let God be owned, and honoured in this Providence. Will you not henceforth call him, *My Father, the Guide of my Youth* ? as it is, *Jer. 3. 4.* Surely, it was the Lord that guided you to settle as you did in those days of your Youth : You reap at this day, and may to your last day, the fruits of those early Providences in your Youth.

Now see that you walk answerable to the obligations of Providence in this particular ; and see to it in the fear of God, that you abuse not any of those things to *his dishonour*, which he hath wrought for *your comfort*. To prevent which, I will here drop a few needful Cautions, and shut up this particular.

1. *Caution.* Be not slothful and idle in your *Vocations*. It's said, *Augustus* built an *Apragapolis*, a City void of business ; but I am sure God never erected any City, Town or Family to that end. The Command to *Adam*, *Gen. 3. 19.* no doubt reaches all his posterity : and Gospel-Commands back and second it upon Christians, *Rom. 12. 11.* and *1 Thess. 4. 11.* If you be negligent, you cannot be innocent. And yet,

2. *Caution.* Be not so intent upon your *particular Callings*, as to make them interfere with your *general Calling*. Beware you lose not your God in the Crowd and Hurry of earthly Business. Mind that solemn warning, *1 Tim. 6. 9.* *But they that will be rich fall into Temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* The Inhabitants of *OEnoc*, a dry Island near *Athens*, bestowed much labour to draw in a River to water it, and make it fruitful ; but when the Sluces were opened, the waters flowed so abundantly, that it overflowed the

the Island, and drowned the Inhabitants. The Application is obvious. It was an excellent saying of Seneca, *rebus non me trado, sed commodo*. I don't give, but lend my self to business.

Remember always, the success of your Callings and earthly Employments is by Divine Blessing, not human Diligence alone, *Deut. 8. 18. Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is he that giveth thee Power to get Wealth.* The Devil himself was so far Orthodox, as to acknowledge it, *Job 1. 10. Hast not thou made an Hedge about him, and about his House, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the Work of his Hands, &c.* Recommend therefore your Affairs to God by Prayer, according to *Psalms 37. 4, 5. Delight thy self also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine Heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.* And touch not with that which you cannot recommend to God by Prayer for a Blessing.

Be well satisfied in that Station and Employment in which Providence hath placed you, and do not so much as wish your selves in another, *1 Cor. 7. 20. Let every Man abide in the same Calling, wherein he was called.* Providence is wiser than you, and you may be confident hath suited all things better to your Eternal Good, than you could do, had you been left to your own Option.

The Sixth Performance of Providence.

VI.

Thus you see the Care Providence hath had over you in your Youth, in respect of that Civil Employment to which it guided us in those Days.

We

Providential Per-
formances
with re-
spect to
our Civil
Relations.

We will in the next Place consider it *as our Guide, and the Orderer of our Relations for us.* That Providence hath a special Hand in this Matter, is evident both from Scripture Assertions, and the Acknowledgments of Holy Men, who in that great Concernment of their Lives, have still owned, and acknowledged the directing Hand of Providence. Take an Instance of both. The Scripture plainly asserts the Dominion of Providence over this Affair, in *Prov. 19. 14. A prudent Wife is from the Lord :* And *Prov. 18. 22. Whoso findeth a Wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth Favour of the Lord.* So for Children, see *Psalms 127. 3. Lo, Children are an Heritage of the Lord ; and the Fruit of the Womb is his Reward.*

And it hath ever been the Practice of Holy Men, to seek the Lord for Direction and Counsel, when they have been upon the Change of their Condition. No doubt but *Abraham's* Encouragement in that Case was the Fruit of Prayer, *Gen. 24. 7.* His pious Servant also, who was employ'd in that Affair, did both earnestly seek Counsel of God, *Gen. 24. 12.* and thankfully acknowledge his gracious Providence in guiding it, *Ver. 26, 27.*

The same we may observe in Children, the Fruit of Marriage, *1 Sam. 1. 20. Luke 1. 13, 14.* Now the Providence of God may be divers ways displayed for the engaging of our Hearts in Love to the God of our Mercies.

(1.) There is very much of Providence seen in appointing the Parties each for other. In this, the Lord goes oftentimes beyond our Thoughts and Projections ; yea, and oftentimes crosses Mens desires and designs to their great advantage. Not what they fancy ; but what his Infinite Wisdom

God judges best, and most beneficial for them, takes place. Hence it is, that Probabilities are so often dashed ; and things remote and utterly improbable are brought about, in very strange and unaccountable Methods of Providence.

(2.) There is much of Providence seen in the Harmony and Agreeableness of Tempers and Dispositions ; from whence a very great part of Tranquility and Comforts of our Lives result : Or at least, though natural Tempers and Educations did not so much harmonize before, yet they do so after they come under the Ordinance of God, *Gen. 2. 24. They two shall be one Flesh, not one only in respect of God's Institution, but one in respect of Love and Affection, that those who so lately were meer strangers to each other, are now endeared to a degree beyond the nearest Relations in Blood. Ubi supra, For this cause shall a Man leave Father and Mother, and shall cleave to his Wife, and they two shall be one Flesh.*

(3.) But especially, Providence is remarkable, in making one Instrumental to the Eternal Good of the other, *1 Cor. 7. 16. How knowest thou, O Wife, but thou mayst save thy Husband? Or how knowest thou, O Man, whether thou shalt save thy Wife?* Hence is that grave Exhortation to the Wives of unbelieving Husbands, *1 Pet. 3. 1. to win them by their Conversation, which should be to them instead of an Ordinance.*

Or if both be gracious, then what singular Assistance and mutual Help is hereby gained to the Furtherance of their Eternal Good ? Whilst they live together as *Heirs of the Grace of Life, 1 Pet. 3. 7. O blessed Providence ! that directed such into so intimate Relation on Earth, who shall inherit together the common Salvation in Heaven !*

(4.) How

(4.) How much of Providence is seen in *Children*, the Fruit of *Marriage*? To have any Posterity in the Earth, and not be left altogether as a dry Tree: To have Comfort and Joy in them, is a special Providence, importing a special Mercy to us. To have the Breaches made upon our Families, repair'd, is a Providence to be own'd with a thankful Heart. When God shall say to a Man as he speaks in another Case to the Church, *Isa. 49. 20. The Children which thou shalt have after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine Ears, the Place is too strait for me, &c.*

And these Providences will appear more affectingly sweet and lovely to you, if you but compare its Allotments to you; with what it hath allotted to many others in the World. For do but look abroad, and you shall find,

(1.) Multitudes unequally yoked, to the embittering of their Lives, whose Relations are Clogs and Hinderances both in Temporals and Spirituals. Yea, we find an account in Scripture of gracious Persons, a great Part of whose Comfort in this World hath been split upon this Rock. *Abigail* was a discreet and vertuous Woman, but very unsuitably matched to a churlish *Nabal*, see *1 Sam. 25. 25.* What a Temptation, to the Neglect of a known Duty, prevail'd upon the renowned *Moses*, by the Means of *Zipporah* his Wife? *Exod. 4. 24, 25.* *David* had his scoffing *Michal*, *2 Sam. 6. 20.* And patient *Job* no small Addition to all his other Afflictions, from the Wife of his Bosom, who should have been a support to him in the Day of his Trouble, *Job 19. 17.*

No doubt but God sanctifies such Rods to his Peoples Good. If *Socrates* knew how to improve his Affliction in his *Zantippe*, to the Increase of his

his Patience ; much more will they who converse with God under all Providences, whether sweet or bitter. Nevertheless, this must be acknowledged to be a sad stroke upon any Person, and such as maims them upon the working Hand, by unfitting them for Duty, 1 Pet. 3. 7. and cuts off much of the Comfort of Life also.

(2.) How many are there, who never enjoy the comfortable Fruits of Marriage? But are denied the sight, at least the Enjoyment of Children, *Jer. 22. 30. Thus saith the Lord, write this Man childless, &c.* or if they have Children, yet cannot enjoy them, *Hos. 9. 12. Though they bring up Children, yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a Man left ;* who only bear for the Grave, and have their Expectations raised for a greater Affliction to themselves.

(3.) And it is no rare or unusual Thing to see Children and near Relations the greatest Instruments of Affliction to their Parents and Friends: So that after all their other Sorrows and Troubles in the World, nearest Relations bring up the Rear of Sorrows (as one speaks) and prove greater Mr. T. C. Grievances than any other. O how many Parents in his *Isa-* have complain'd with the Tree in the Fable, that *gogue.* their very Hearts have been rived asunder with those Wedges that were cut out of their own Bodies? What a Grief was *Esau* to *Isaac* and *Rebekah*? *Gen. 26. 34, 35.* What a Scourge were *Abalom* and *Amnon* to *David*?

Well then, if God have set the solitary in Families, as it is *Psalms 68. 6.* Built an House for the desolate, given you comfortable Relations, which are Springs of daily Comfort and Refreshment to you, you are upon many Accounts engaged to walk answerably to these gracious Providences. And

And that you may understand wherein that *Decorum* and agreeable Comportment with these Providences consists, take up the Sense of your Duty in these brief hints.

(1.) Ascribe to God the Glory of all those Providential Works which yield you comfort. You see a wise, directing, governing Providence, which hath disposed and ordered all things beyond your own Projections and Designs. *The Way of Man is not in himself, nor is it in him that walketh to direct his own Steps, Jer. 10. 23.* Not what you projected, but what an higher counsel than yours determined, is come to pass. Good *Jacob*, when God had made him the Father of a Family, admired God in the Mercy, *Gen. 32. 10. With my Staff* (said he) *I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two Bands.* And how doth this Mercy humble and melt him? *I am not worthy of the least of all the Mercies, and of all the Truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy Servant.*

Be exact in discharging the Duties of those Relations which so gracious a Providence hath led you into. Abuse not the Effects of so much Mercy and Love to you. The Lord expects Praise, where-ever you have Comfort. This aggravated *David's* Sin, that he should dare to abuse so great Love and Mercy, as God had shewn him in his Family-Relations, *2 Sam. 12. 7, 8, 9.*

3. Improve Relations to the End Providence design'd them: Walk together as Co-heirs of the Grace of Life: Study to be mutual Blessings to each other: So walk in your Relations, that the parting Day may be sweet. Death will shortly break up the Family; and then nothing but the Sense of Duty discharg'd, or the Neglects pardon'd, will give Comfort.

The Mystery of Providence.

85

The Seventh Performance of Providence.

VII.

You have heard how well Providence hath performed its part for you, in planting you into Families, who once were solitary. Now let us, in the next Place, view another gracious Performance of Providence for us, in making Provision from time to time for us and our Families. I the rather put these Providences together in this Place, because I find the Scripture doth so, *Psalm 107. 41. He setteth the Poor on high from Affliction, and maketh him Families like a Flock.*

Providential Provision for us and ours.

You know the Promises God hath made to his People, *Psalm 34. 10. The young Lions shall lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord, shall not want any good thing.* And have you not also seen the constant Performance of it? Cannot you give the same Answer, if the same Question were propounded to you that the Disciples did, *Luke 22. 35. Since I sent you forth, lacked ye any thing? and they said, Nothing.* Can ye not with *Jacob* call him; *the God that fed you all your Life long?* *Gen. 48. 15. Surely he hath given Bread to them that fear him, and been ever mindful of his Covenant,* *Psalm 111. 5.*

To display this Providence, we will consider it in the following Particulars.

(1.) The *Affiduity* and *Constancy* of the Care of Providence for the Saints, *Lam. 3. 23. His Mercies are new every Morning.* It is not the Supply of one or two pressing Needs, but all your Wants, as they grow from day to day through all your days, *Gen. 48. 15. The God that fed me all my Life long.* The Care of Providence runs parallel with the Line of Life. See *Isa. 46. 3, 4. Hearken unto me, O House of Jacob, and all the Remnant of the House of*
G Israel,

Israel, which are born by me from the Belly, which are carried from the Womb: And even to your old Age I am he, and even to hoary Hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry, and will deliver you. So that as God bid Israel, Micah 6. 5. To remember from Shittim unto Gilgal, that they might know the Faithfulness of the Lord; so would I perswade thee, Reader, to record the Ways of Providence, from first to last, throughout thy whole Course to this Day, that thou mayst see what a God he hath been to thee.

(2.) The Seasonableness and Opportuneness of its Provisions for them: For so runs the Promise, Isa. 41. 17. *When the poor and needy seek Water, and there is none, and their Tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them;* and so hath the Performance of it been. And this hath been made good to distressed Saints sometimes in a more ordinary Way, God secretly blessing a Little, and making it sufficient for us and ours: Job tells us of the secret of God upon his Tabernacle, Job 29. 4. (i. e.) his secret Blessing is in their Tabernacles; by Reason whereof it is that they subsist; but it is in an unaccountable way that they do so. And sometimes in an extraordinary way it breaks forth for their Supply. So you find in 2 Kings 17. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. The Cruse and Barrel fail not.

Clark's Mr. Samuel Clark, in the Life of that painful Lives, vol. and humble Servant of Christ Mr. John Fox, records a memorable Instance of Providence, and it is this, That towards the end of King Henry the Eighth his Reign he went to London, where he quickly spent that little his Friends had given him, or he had acquired by his own Diligence, and began to be in great want. As one Day he sat

in Paul's Church, spent with long Fasting, his Countenance thin, and his Eyes hollow, after the ghastly manner of dying Men, every one shunning a Spectacle of so much Horror ; there came one to him, whom he had never seen before, and thrust an untold Sum of Money into his Hand, bidding him be of good Cheer, and accept that small Gift in good part from his Country-man ; and that he should make much of himself, for that within a few Days new Hopes were at hand, and a more certain Condition of Livelihood. Three Days after the Dutches of Richmond sent for him to live in her House, and be Tutor to the Earl of Surrey's Children, then under her Care.

Mr. Isaac Ambrose, a worthy Divine, whose Labours have made him acceptable to his Generation, in his Epistle to the Earl of Bedford, prefix'd to his *Last Things*, gives a pregnant Instance in his own Case. His Words are these : *For mine own part (saith he) however the Lord hath seen Cause to give me but a poor Pittance of outward Things, for which I bless his Name ; yet in the Income thereof, I have many times observed so much of his peculiar Providence, that thereby they have been very much sweetned, and my Heart hath been raised to admire his Grace. When of late under an hard Dispensation (which I judge not meet to mention) wherein I suffered conscientiously, all Streams of wonted Supplies being stopt, the Waters of Relief for my self and Family did run low : I went to Bed with some Staggers and Doubtings of the Fountains letting out it self for our refreshing ; but e'er I did awake in the Morning, a Letter was brought to my Bed-side, which was signed by a choice Friend, Mr. Anthony Ash, which reported some unexpected Breakings out of God's*

Divine Conduct : Or,

Goodness for my Comfort. These are some of his Lines ——— Your God, who hath given you a Heart thankfully to record your Experiences of his Goodness, doth renew Experiences for your Encouragement. Now I shall report one, which will raise your Spirit toward the God of your Mercies. Whereupon he sweetly concludes, One Morfel of God's Provision, especially when it comes in unexpected, and upon Prayer, when Wants are most, will be more sweet to spiritual Relish, than all former Enjoyments were.

(3.) The Wisdom of Providence in our Provisions. And this is discovered in two Things : (1.) In proportioning the quantity, not satisfying our extravagant *Wishes*, but answering our real *Needs* ; consulting our *Wants*, not our *Wantonness*, Phil. 4. 19. *My God shall supply all your Wants* ; and this hath exactly suited the *Wishes* of the best and wisest Men, who desired no more at its hand. So *Jacob*, Gen. 28. 20. and *Agur*, Prov. 30. 8, 9. Wise Providence considers our Condition as *Pilgrims* and *Strangers*, and so allots the *Viaticum* Provision, that is needful for our Passage home. It knows the mischievous Influence of Fulness and Redundancy upon most Men, though sanctified ; and how apt it is to make them remiss, and forgetful of God, Deut. 6. 12. That their Hearts, like the *Moon*, suffers an Eclipse, when it is at the full ; and so suits and orders all to their best advantage. (2.) Its Wisdom is much discovered in the manner of dispensing our Portion to us. It many times suffers our *Wants* to pinch hard, and many *Fears* to arise, out of design to magnify the Care and Love of God in the Supply, Deut. 8. 3. Providence so orders the Case, that Faith and Prayer coming betwixt our *Wants* and *Supplies*, the Goodness of God may be the more magnified in our Eyes thereby. And

And now let me beg you to consider the good Hand of Providence, that hath provided for, and suitably supplied you and yours all your Days, and never failed you hitherto: And labour to walk suitably to your Experiences of such Mercies. In order whereunto, let me press a few suitable Cautions upon you.

1. Beware, that you forget not the Care and Kindness of Providence which your Eyes have seen in so many Fruits and Experiences thereof. It was God's Charge against *Israel*, *Psal.* 106. 3. *That they soon forgot his wondrous Works.* A bad Heart and a slippery Memory deprive Men of the Comfort of many Mercies, and defraud God of the Glory due for them.

2. Do not distrust Providence in future Exigencies. Thus they did, *Psalm* 78. 20. *Behold, he smote the Rock, that the Waters gushed out, and the Streams overflowed: can he give Bread also? can he provide Flesh for his People?* How unreasonable and absurd are these Queries of Unbelief, especially after their Eyes had seen the Power of God in such extraordinary Effects?

3. Do not murmur and regret under new straits. This is a vile Temper; and yet how incident to us, when Wants press hard upon us! Ah! did we but rightly understand what the demerit of Sin is, we would rather admire the Bounty of God, than complain of the Strait-handedness of Providence. And if we did but consider, that there lies upon God no Obligation of Justice or Gratitude to reward any of our Duties, it would cure our Murmurs, *Gen.* 32. 20.

4. Do not shew the least Discontent at the Lot and Portion Providence carves out to you. O that you would be well pleased and satisfied with

all its Appointments. Say as *Psal. 16. 6.* *The Lines are fallen unto me in pleasant Places ; yea, I have a goodly Heritage.* Surely that is best for you, which Providence hath appointed, and one Day you your selves will judge it so to be.

5. Do not neglect Prayer when Straits befall you. You see it's Providence dispenses all, you live upon it ; therefore apply your selves to God in the Times of need. This is evidently included in the *Promise*, *Isa. 41. 17.* as well as expressed in the *Command*, *Phil. 4. 6.* Remember God, and he will not forget you.

6. Do not distract your Hearts with sinful Cares, *Mat. 6. 25, 26.* Consider *the Fowls of the Air* (saith Christ) not the Fowls at the Door, that are daily fed by Hand ; but those of the *Air*, that know not where to have the next Meal ; and yet God provides for them. Remember your Relation to Christ, and his Engagements by Promise to you, and by these things work your Hearts to Satisfaction and Content with all the Allotments of Providence.

The Eighth Performance of Providence.

VIII.

Providential Performances in our Preservation from the Power of Temptation.

The next great Advantage and Mercy the Saints receive from the Hand of Providence, is *in their Preservation from the Snares and Temptations of Sin, by its preventing Care over them.* That Providence wards off many a deadly Stroke of Temptation, and puts by many a mortal Thrust which Satan makes at our Souls, is a Truth as manifest as the Light that shineth. This is included in that Promise, *1 Cor. 10. 13.* God will *with the Temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* Providence gives an Out-let for the Soul's Escape, when it is shut up into the dange-

dangerous straits of Temptation. There are two eminent Ways whereby the force and efficacy of Temptation is broken in Believers. One is by the Operation of internal Grace, *Gal. 5. 17. The Spirit lusteth against the Flesh*; so that ye cannot do the Things that ye would; *i. e.* Sanctification gives Sin a miscarrying Womb after it hath conceived in the Soul. The other way is by the external working of Providence; and of this I am here engaged to speak.

The Providence of God is the great Obex and hinderance to a World of Sin, which else would break forth like an overflowing Flood from our corrupt Natures. It prevents abundance of Sin, which else wicked Men would commit, *Gen. 19. 11. The Sodomites* were greedily pursuing their Lusts; God providentially hinders it, by smiting them blind. *Jeroboam* intends to smite the Prophet; Providence interpos'd, and wither'd his Arm, *1 Kings 13. 4.* Thus you see, when wicked Men have contrived, and are ready to execute their Wickedness, Providence claps on its Manacles, *That their Hands cannot perform their Enterprizes*, as it is *Job 5. 12.*

And so much Corruption there remains on good Men, that they would certainly plunge themselves under much more Guilt than they do, if Providence did not take greater care of them than they do of themselves: For tho' they make conscience of keeping themselves, and daily watch their Hearts and Ways, yet such is the Deceitfulness of Sin, that if Providence did not lay Blocks in their way, it would (more frequently than it doth) entangle and defile them. And this it doth divers Ways.

(1.) Sometimes by stirring up others to interpose with seasonable Counsels, which effectually dissuade them from prosecuting an evil Design. Thus *Abigail* meets *David* in the nick of Time, and dissuades him from his evil Purpose, 1 Sam. 25. 34.

And I find it recorded (as on another account was noted before) of that Holy Man *Mr. Dod*, that being late at Night in his Study, he was strongly moved (tho' at an unseasonable Hour) to visit a Gentleman of his Acquaintance; and not knowing what might be the Design of Providence therein, he obeyed, and went; when he came to the House, after a few Knocks at the Door, the Gentleman himself came to him, and ask'd him, whether he had any Business to him: *Mr. Dod* answered, no; but that he could not be quiet till he had seen him. O Sir, reply'd the Gentleman, you are sent of God at this Hour, for just now (and with that, takes the Halter out of his Pocket) I was going to destroy my self. And thus was the Mischief prevented.

(2.) Sometimes by hindering the Means and Instruments, whereby the Evil it self is prevented. Thus, when good *Jehoshaphat* had joined himself with that wicked King *Abaziah*, to build Ships at *Ezion-Gaber* to go to *Tarshish*, God prevents the Design, by breaking the Ships with a Storm, as you read, 2 Chron. 20. 35, 36, 37.

We find also in the Life of *Mr. Bolton*, written by *Mr. Bagshaw*, That whilst he was in *Oxford*, he had familiar acquaintance with *Mr. Anderton*, a good Scholar, but a strong Papist, who knowing *Mr. Bolton's* good Parts, and perceiving that he was in some outward wants, took this advantage,

rage, and used many Arguments to perswade him to be reconciled to the Church of *Rome*, and to go over with him to the *English Seminary*, assuring him he should be furnished with all Necessaries, and have Gold enough. Mr. *Bolton* being at that time poor in Mind and Purse, accepted the Motion, and a Day and Place was appointed in *Lancashire*, where they should meet and take Shipping, and be gone: But Mr. *Anderton* came not, and so he escaped the Snare.

Some Afflictions are τιμωρίαι, Punishments; others are

(3.) Sometimes by laying some strong Affliction upon the Body, to prevent a worse Evil. And this is the Meaning of *Hosea* 2. 6. *I will hedge up her Way with Thorns.* Thus *Basil* was a long Time exercised with a violent Head-Ach, which (as he observed) was used by Providence to prevent Lust. *Paul* had a Thorn in the Flesh, a Messenger of Satan sent to buffet him: And this Affliction, whatever it was, was ordained to prevent Pride in him, 2 Cor.

παιδείαι, Chastisements; and these are both δοκιμασίαι, Trials of Grace; and πειρασμοί, Preservatives from Sin.

(4.) Sometimes Sin is prevented in the Saints, by the better Information of their Minds at the Sacred Oracles of God. Thus, when sinful Motions began to rise in *David's* Mind, from the Prosperity of the Wicked, and his own Afflicted State, and grew to that height, that he began to think all he had done in the way of Religion, was little better than lost Labour; he is set right again, and the Temptation dissolved, by going into the *Sanctuary*, where God shewed him how to take new Measures of Persons and Things; to judge them by their Ends and Issues, not their present Appearances, *Psalms* 73. 12, 13, 17.

(5.) And sometimes the Providence of God prevents the Sins of his People, by removing them out

out of the way of Temptations by Death. In which Sense we may understand that Text, *Iſa.* 57. 1. *The Righteous is taken away from the Evil to come*; the Evil of Sin as well as Sufferings. When the Lord sees his People low-spirited, and not able to grapple with strong Tryals and Temptations which are drawing on, it is with respect to them a merciful Providence, to be disbanded by Death, and set out of harms way.

Now consider, and admire the Providence of God, O ye Saints, who hath had more Care of your Souls, than ever ye had of them. Had not the Providence of God thus wrought for you in a way of Prevention, it may be you had this Day been so many *Magor Miſſabibs*. How was the Heart of *David* melted under that preventing Providence fore-mentioned in *1 Sam.* 25. 34. He blesses the Lord, the Instrument, and the Counsel by which his Soul was preserved from Sin. Do but seriously bethink your selves of a few Particulars about this Case: As,

(1.) How your corrupt Natures have often impetuously hurried you on towards Sin, so that all the inherent Grace you had could not withstand its Force, if Providence had not prevented it in some such Method as you have heard, *Jam.* 1. 14. *Every Man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own Lusts, and enticed.* You found your selves but Feathers in the Wind of Temptation.

(2.) How near you have been brought to the Brink of Sin, and yet saved by a merciful Hand of Providence. May you not say with him in *Prov.* 5. 14. *I was almost in the midst of all Evil*: or as *Pſal.* 73. 2. *My Feet were almost gone, my Steps bad well nigh ſlidden.* O merciful Providence! that stept in so opportunely to your relief.

(3.) How

(3.) How many have been suffer'd to fall by the hand of Temptations, to the Reproach of Religion, and wounding of their own Consciences to that degree, that they have never recovered former Peace again; but lived in the world devoid of Comfort to their dying day?

(4.) How woful your case had been, if the Lord had not mercifully saved you from many thousand Temptations, that have assaulted you? I tell you, you cannot estimate the Mercies you possess by Means of such Providences. Are your Names sweet, and your Consciences peaceful, two Mercies as dear to you as your two Eyes? Why surely, you owe them, if not wholly, yet in great Measure, to the Aids and Assistances Providence hath given you all along the way you have passed through the dangerous tempting World to this Day.

Walk therefore suitably to this Obligation of Providence also: And see,

(1.) That you thankfully own it. Don't impute your Escapes from Sin to Accidents, or to your own Watchfulness or Wisdom.

(2.) See that you tempt not Providence on the other hand, by an irregular Reliance upon its Care over you, without taking all due Care of yourselves. *Keep you selves in the Love of God, Jude 21. Keep your Hearts with all Diligence, Prov. 4. 23.* Though Providence keep you, yet it is in the Way of your Duty.

The Ninth Performance of Providence.

IX.

Thus you see what Care Providence hath had over your Souls, in preventing the spiritual Dangers and Miseries that else would have befallen you in the way of Temptations: In the next Place I will shew you,

Psal. 17.8. you, that it hath been *no less careful for your Bo-*
 Thou *dies, and with how great Tenderness it hath carried*
 keepest *them in its Arms through innumerable hazards and*
 me as the *dangers also. He is called the Keeper of Israel, that*
 Apple of *never slumbereth nor sleepeth, Psal. 121. 4. The Pre-*
 thine Eye. *server of Men, Job 7. 20. To display the Glory of*
 The Eye *this Providence before you, let us take into Con-*
 hath five *sideration, the Perils into which the best of Men*
 Tunicks to *sometimes fall, and the Way and Means by which*
 guard it a- *Providence preserves them in those Dangers.*
 gainst *(1.) Ara-*
 Danger. *nea tunica, like a Spiders Web. (2.) Retiformis, like a Net. (3.) U-*
vea, like a Berry. (4.) Cornea, like an Horn. (5.) Adnata tunica,
the Cover or Lid of the Eye: Here is Guard upon Guard, resembling the
various Ways Providence hath to secure us from Ruin.

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the Cover or Lid of the Eye: Here is Guard upon Guard, resembling the
various Ways Providence hath to secure us from Ruin.

There are manifold Hazards into which we are often cast in this World. The Apostle *Paul* gives us a general Account of his Dangers, in *2 Cor. 11. 26.* And how great a Wonder is it, that our Life hath not been extinguish'd in some of those Dangers we have been in? For,

(1.) Have not some of us fallen, and that often, into very dangerous Sickneses and Diseases, in which we have approached to the very brink of the Grave? and have or might have said with *Hezekiah, Isa. 38. 10. I said in the cutting off of my*

See Job
33. 18, 19,
20, 21, &
28.

Days, I shall go to the Gates of the Grave: I am deprived of the Residue of my Years. Have we not often had the Sentence of Death in our selves? And our Bodies at that time been like a leaky Ship in

Mr. Tho.
Goodwin
in his Ag-
gravation
of Sin a-
gainst
Mercy, p.
30.

a Storm (as one aptly resembles it) that hath taken in Water on every side, till it was ready to sink? Yet hath God preserved, careened, and launched us out again as well as ever. Oh what a Wonder is it, that such a crazy Body should be preserved for so many Years, and survive so ma-

ny

ny Dangers ! Surely, it is not more admirable to see a *Venice* Glass pass from Hand to Hand in continual Use, for forty or fifty Years, and still to remain whole, notwithstanding many knocks and falls it hath had. If you enjoy Health or recover out of Sickneses, it is because *he puts none of these Diseases upon thee*, or because he is the Lord thy Physician, *Exod. 15. 26.*

The Eye is but a small part of the Body, yet Physicians reckon no less than thirty Diseases incident to it. Nascuntur in eo leucoma, glaucoma, lippitudo, zephthalmia, ficus, lithiasis, epiphora & triginta id genus vitia.

(2.) And how many deadly Dangers hath his Hand rescued some of you from, in those Years of Confusion and publick Calamity, when the Sword was bashed in Blood, and made horrid Slaughter, when it may be your Lives were often given you for a Prey ? This *David* put a special Remark upon, *Psal. 140. 7.* O God the Lord, the Strength of my Salvation, thou hast covered my Head in the Day of Battle.

Beza being in France, in the first Civil War, and there tossed up and down for two and twenty Months, recorded six hundred Deliverances from Dangers in that space, for which he solemnly gave God Thanks in his last Testament. If the Sword destroyed you not, it was because God did not give it a Commission so to do.

(3.) Many of you have seen wonders of Salvation upon the deeps, where the hand of God hath been signally stretched forth for your rescue and deliverance. This is elegantly expressed in *Psal. 107. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27.* (which I have * else- * See my where opened at large) concerning which, you Seaman's may say in a proper Sense, what the Psalmist doth Compani- metaphorically, *Psal. 124. 1 & 4.* If it had not been on, p. 41. the Lord who was on our side, then the Waters had over-

overwhelmed us, the Stream had gone over our Soul. To see Men that have spent so many Years upon the Seas (where your Lives have continually hung in Suspence before you) attain to your Years, when you could neither be reckon'd among the *living* nor the *dead* (as Seamen are not :) Oh, what cause have you to adore your great Preserver! Many thousands of your Companions are gone down, and you yet here to praise the Lord among the living. You have bordered nearer to Eternity all your days than others, and often been in eminent Perils upon the Seas, surely such, and so many Salvations call aloud upon you for most thankful Acknowledgments.

(4.) To conclude, how innumerable Hazards and Accidents, (the least of which hath cut off others) hath God carried us all through! I think I may safely say, your privitive and positive Mercies of this kind are more in number than the Hairs of your Heads. Many thousands of these Dangers we never saw, nor were made particularly sensible of; but though we saw them not, our God did, and brought us out of *Danger* before he brought us into *Fear*. Some have been evident to us, and those so remarkable, that we cannot think, or speak of them to this day, but our Souls are freshly affected with those Mercies.

Clark's
Lives, p.
262.

It is recorded of our famous *Jewell*, that about the Beginning of Queen *Mary's* Reign, the Inquisition taking hold of him in *Oxford*, he fled to *London* by Night: but providentially losing the *Road*, he escaped the *Inquisitors*, who pursued him: however, he fell that Night into another eminent Hazard of Life, for wandering up and down in the Snow, he fainted, and lay starving in the way, panting and labouring for Life,

at which time Mr. Latimer's Servant found and ſaved him.

It were eaſie to multiply Examples in this kind, Hiſtories abounding with them; but I think there are few of us, but are furniſh'd out of our own experience abundantly; ſo that I ſhall rather chuſe to preſs home the ſenſe of theſe Providences upon you, in order to a ſuitable return to the God of your Mercies for them, than add more Inſtances of this kind. To this purpoſe, I deſire you ſeriously to weigh the following particulars.

(1.) Conſider what you owe to Providence for your Protection, by which your Life hath been protracted unto this day, with the uſefulneſs and comfort thereof. Look abroad in the World, and you may daily ſee ſome in every place, who are Objects of Pity, bereaved by ſad accidents of all the Comforts of Life, whiſt in the mean time Providence hath tenderly preſerved you, *keeping all your Bones, ſo that not one of them is broken,* *Psalm 134. 20.* Is not the elegant and comely Structure of thy Body ſpoiled, thy Members diſtorted, or made ſo many Seats of Torment, the uſefulneſs of any part deprived? Why, this is becauſe Providence never quitted its hand of thee ſince thou cameſt out of the Womb, but with a watchful Eye and tender Hand hath guarded thee in every Place, and kept thee as its charge.

The learned Alſted ſets himſelf to enumerate the manifold hazards through which the life of man is carried in the hand of Provi-

dence, in Theol. Gatechet. p. 191, 192, &c. and piously concludes in theſe Words, Denique, quod ab innumeris malis, quæ ab omnibus creaturis omni tempore tibi impendent, mirabiliter liberaris; in his omnibus, inquam, quæ ſcimus crebro evenire ſolita, ac proinde ita ſe habent, ut nobis quoque poſſint evenire, ſolam Dei providentiam debes ſuſpicere & prædicare.

(2.) Con-

Divine Conduct: Or,

(2.) Consider how every Member which hath been so tenderly kept, hath nevertheless been an Instrument of Sin against the Lord; and that, not only in the days of your unregeneracy, when *ye yielded your Members as Instruments of Unrighteousness unto Sin*, (as the *Apostle* speaks in *Rom. 6. 12.*) but even since you gave them up in Covenant unto the Lord, as dedicated Instruments to his Service: And yet how tender hath Providence been over them! You have often provoked him to afflict you in every part, and lay *penal* Evil upon every Member that hath been instrumental in *moral* Evil; but O how great have his compassions been towards you, and his patience admirable!

(3.) Consider, what is the aim of Providence in all the tender care it hath manifested for you? why doth it protect you so assiduously, and suffer no evil to befall you? Is it not that you should imploy your bodies for God, and cheerfully apply your selves to that service he hath called you to? Doubtless, this is the end and level of these Mercies; for else to what purpose are they afforded you? Your Bodies are a part of Christ's purchase, as well as your Souls, *1 Cor. 6. 19.* They are committed to the charge and tutelage of Angels, *Heb. 1. 14.* who have performed many services for them. They are dedicated by your selves to the Lord, and that upon the highest account, *Rom. 12. 1.* They have already been the subjects of manifold Mercies in this World, *Psal. 35. 10.* and shall partake of singular Glory and Happiness in the World to come, *Phil. 3. 21.* And shall they not then be employed, yea, cheerfully worn out in his service? How reasonable is it they should be so? Why are they so tenderly

tenderly preserved by God, if they must not be used for God?

The Tenth Performance of Providence.

X.

You have heard many and great things performed for you by Divine Providence, in the former particulars; but there is an eminent favour it bestows on the Saints, which hath not yet been considered, and indeed is too little minded by us, and that is, *The aid and assistance it gives the people of God in the great work of Mortification.* *Providential Assurances in the Work of Mortification.*

Mortification of our sinful Affections and Passions, is the one half of our Sanctification, *Rom. 6. 11. dead indeed unto Sin, but alive unto God.*

It's the great Evidence of our Interest in Christ. See *Gal. 5. 24. Rom. 6. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.*

It's our safety in the hour of Temptation. The corruptions in the World are through lust, *2 Pet. 1. 4.*

Our instrumental fitness for service, depends much upon it, *2 Tim. 2. 21. John 15. 2.* How great a service to our Souls therefore must that be, by which this blessed work is carried on upon them?

Now there are two Means or Instruments employed in this work. The Spirit, who effects it internally, *Rom. 8. 13.* And Providence, which assists it externally. The Spirit indeed is the principal Agent, upon whose operation the success of this work depends; and all the Providences in the World can never effect it without him. But these are secondary and subordinate means, which by the blessing of the Spirit upon them, have a great stroke in the work. How they are so serviceable to this end and purpose, I shall open in the following account. H (1.)

Divine Conduct : Or,

(1.) More generally. The most wise God orders the Dispensations of Providence in a blessed Subordination to the Work of his Spirit. There is a sweet Harmony betwixt them in their distinct Workings. They all meet in that one blessed Issue which God hath by the Counsel of his Will directed them to, *Eph. 1. 11. Rom. 8. 28.* Hence it is, that the Spirit is said to be in, and order the Motions of the Wheels of Providence, *Ezek. 1. 20.* and so they move together by consent. Now, one great part of the Spirit's internal Work, being to destroy Sin in the People of God; see how conformable to his design, external Providences are steer'd and order'd in the following Particulars.

(1.) There is in all the Regenerate a strong Propension and Inclination to Sin, and in that lies a principal part of the Power of Sin. Of this Paul sadly complains, *Rom. 7. 23. But I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members :* and every Believer daily finds it to his Grief. O it's hard, it's hard to forbear those things that grieve God. God hath made an Hedge, about us, and fenced us against Sin by his Laws ; but there is a Prone-ness in Nature to break over the Hedge, and that against the very Reluctations of the Spirit of God in us. Now see, in this Case, the Concurrence and Assistance of Providence for the Prevention of Sin; look, as the Spirit internally resists those sinful Inclinations, so Providence externally lays Bars and Blocks in our way to hinder and prevent Sin : and this is the meaning of those places lately cited, *Hosea 2. 6. & 2 Cor. 12. 7.* So *Job 33. 17, 18, 19.* There is many a bodily Distem-

per inflicted on this very Score, to be a Clog to prevent Sin : Oh bear them patiently upon this Consideration. *Basil* was sorely grieved with an inveterate Head-ach, he earnestly prays it might be removed ; God removed it : but no sooner was he freed of this Clog, but he felt the inordinate Motions of Lust ; which made him pray for his Head-ach again. So it might be with many of us, if our Clogs were off.

A Question may be moved here, *Whether it be the Genius and Property of a gracious Spirit, to forbear Sin, because of the rod of Affliction?* They have surely higher Motives and nobler Principles than these. This is the Temper of a carnal and slavish Spirit.

Quest.

Indeed it is so, when this is the sole or principal Restraint from Sin : when a Man abhors not Sin, because of the intrinsick *Filth*, but only because of the troublesome *Consequents* and *Effects*. But this is vastly different from the Case of the Saints under sanctified Afflictions ; for as they have *higher* Motives and *nobler* Principles, so they have *lower* and more *sensible* ones too ; and these are, in their kind and place, very useful to them. (2.) Besides, you must know, that Afflictions work in another way upon gracious Hearts to restrain them from Sin, or warn them against Sin, than they do upon others. It is not so much the Smart of the Rod which they feel, as the Tokens of God's Displeasure, which affright and scare them, *Job* 10. 17. *Thou renewest thy Witnesses against me, &c.* and this is that which principally affects them. See *Psal.* 6. 1. O Lord, rebuke me not in thine Anger, neither chasten me in thy hot Displeasure : and *Jer.* 10. 24. O Lord, correct me, but with Judgment, not in thy Anger, lest thou

Sol.

thou bring me to nothing : and surely this is no low and common Argument.

(2.) Notwithstanding this double Fence of God's Command, and preventive Afflictions, yet Sin is too hard for the best of Men: their Corruptions carry them through all to Sin. And when it is so, not only doth the *Spirit* work internally, but *Providence* also works externally in order to their *Reduction*. The Ways of Sin are not only made bitter unto them, by the Remorse of Conscience, but by those afflictive Rods upon the outward Man, with which God also follows it; and in both these Respects, I find that place expounded, *Eccles. 10. 8. Whoso breaketh an Hedge, a Serpent shall bite him.* If, as some expound it, the *Hedge* be the *Law* of God, then the *Serpent* is the Remorse of Conscience, and the sharp Teeth of *Affliction*, which he shall quickly feel, if he be one that belongs to God.

The Design and Aim of these afflictive Providences, is to purge and cleanse them from that Pollution into which Temptations have plunged them, *Isa. 27. 9. By this shall the Iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the Fruit, to take away his Sin.* To the same purpose is that place, *Psal. 119. 67. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy Word.* These Afflictions have the same use and end to our Souls, that frosty Weather hath upon those Clothes that are laid a bleaching; they alter the Hue, and make it whiter, *Dan. 10. 35. And some of them of Understanding shall fall to try them, and to purge, and to make them white.*

And here it may be queried, Upon what account Afflictions are said to purge away the Iniquities of the Saints. Is it not unwarrantable, and very dishonourable

nourable to Christ, to attribute that to Affliction, which is the peculiar Honour of his Blood?

It is confessed, that the Blood of Christ is the only *Lavatory*, or Fountain opened for Sin, and that no Afflictions, how many, or strong, or continual soever they be, can in themselves purge away the Pollution of Sin, as we see in wicked Men, who are afflicted and afflicted, and again afflicted; and yet, nevertheless sinful: and the Torments of Hell, how extream, universal and continual soever they are, yet shall never fetch out the Stain of one Sin.

But yet, this hinders not, but that a sanctified Affliction, may in the Efficacy and Virtue of Christ's Blood, produce such blessed Effects upon the Soul. Though a *Cross* without a *Christ*, never did any Man good, yet thousands have been beholden to the *Cross*, as it hath wrought in the Virtue of his Death for their good. And this is the Case of those Souls that this Discourse is concerned about.

(3.) We find the best Hearts, if God bestow any comfortable Enjoyment upon them, too apt to be over-heated in their Affections towards it, and to be too much taken up with these outward Comforts. This also sheweth the great Power and Strength of Corruption in the People of God; and must by some means or other be mortified in them.

This was the Case of *Hezekiah*, his Heart was too much affected with his Treasures; so that he could not hide a vain-glorious Temper, as you find, *Isa.* 39. 2. and so good *David*, *Psal.* 30. 7. he thought his Mountain, (i. e. his Kingdom, and the Splendor and Glory of his present State) had stood so fast, that it should never be moved.

Divine Conduct: Or,

The same good Man, how did he let out his Heart and Affections upon his beautiful Son *Ab-salom*? as appears by the doleful Lamentation he made at his Death, prizing him above his own Life, which was a thousand times more worth than he.

So *Jonah*, when God raised up a *Gourd* for him to shelter him from the Sun, how excessively was he taken with it, and was exceedingly glad of it?

But will God suffer things to lie thus? Shall the Creature purloin, and draw away our Affections from him? No, this is our Corruption, and God will purge it. And to this end he sends forth Providence to smite those Creatures, on which our Affections are either inordinately or excessively let out, or else to turn them into Rods, and smite us by them.

Is *Hezekiah* too much puffed up with his full Exchequer? Why, those very *Babylonians* to whom he boasted of it, shall empty it, and make a Prey of it, *Isa.* 39. 6.

Is *David* hugging himself in a fond Conceit of the Stability of his earthly Splendor? Lo, how soon God beclouds all, *Psal.* 30. 7. Is *Absalom* doted on, and crept too far into his good Father's Heart? this shall be the Son of his Sorrow, that shall seek after his Father's Life.

Is *Jonah* so transported with his *Gourd*? God will prepare a Worm to smite it, *Jonah* 4. 6, 7.

How many Husbands, Wives and Children hath Providence smitten upon this very Account? It might have spared them longer, if they had been loved more regularly, and moderately. This hath blasted many an Estate, and hopeful Project; and it is a merciful Dispensation for our good.

(4.) The

(4.) The Strength of our unmortified Corruption shews it self in our Pride, and the swelling Vanity of our Hearts, when we have a Name and Esteem among Men; when we are applauded and honoured, when we are admired for any Gift or Excellency that is in us, this draws forth the Pride of the Heart, and shews the Vanity that is in it. So you read, *Prov. 27. 21. As the fining Pot for Silver, and the Furnace for Gold, so is a Man to his Praise; i. e.* as the Furnace will discover what Dross is in the Mettal when it is melted, so will Praise and Commendations discover what Pride is in the Heart of him that receives them. This made a good Man say, *He that praises me, wounds me.* And which is more strange, this Corruption may be felt in the Heart, even when the last Breath is ready to expire. It was the Saying of one of the German Divines, when those about him recounted for his Encouragement the many Services he had done for God, *auferte ignem* (saith he) *adhuc enim paleas habeo.* Take away the Fire, for there is still the Chaff of Pride in me. To crucify this Corruption, Providence takes off the Bridle of Restraint from ungodly Men, and sometimes permits them to traduce the Names of God's Servants, as *Shimei* did *David's*. Yea, they shall fall into disesteem among their Friends, as *Paul* did among the *Corinthians*; and all this to keep down the swelling of their Spirits at the Sense of those Excellencies that are in them: The design of these Providences being nothing else, but to *hide Pride from Man.* Yea, it deserves a special Remark, that when some good Men have been engaged in a publick and eminent Work, and have therein, it may be, too much sought their own Applause, God hath with-held usual

Divine Conduct: Or,

Assistance at such times from them, and caused them to falter so in their Work, that they have come off with Shame and Pity at such times, how ready and presential soever they have been at other times. It were easy to give divers remarkable Examples to confirm this Observation. But I pass on.

(5.) The Corruption of the Heart shews it self, in raising up great Expectations to our selves from the Creature, and projecting abundance of Felicity and Contentment from some promising and hopeful Enjoyments we have in the World. This we find to have been the Case of holy Job in the Days of his Prosperity, *Job 28. 19. Then I said, I shall die in my Nest; I shall multiply my Days as the Sand.* But how soon were all these Expectations dashed by a gloomy Providence, that benighted him in the Noon-tide of his Prosperity; and all this for his good, to take off his Heart more fully from Creature Expectations. We often find the best Men to over-reckon themselves in worldly things, and over-act their Confidences about them. They that have great and well-grounded Expectations from *Heaven*, may have too great and ungrounded Expectations from the *Earth*. But when it is so, it's very usual for Providence to undermine their Earthly Hopes, and convince them by experience how vain they are. Thus *Haggai 2. 9.* the Peoples Hearts were intently set upon prosperous Providences, full Harvests, and great Increase; whilst in the mean while no regard was had to the Worship of God, and the things of his House; therefore Providence blasts their Hopes, and brings them to little.

(6.) Cor-

(6.) Corruption discovers it self in dependance upon Creature Comforts, and sensible Props. Oh how apt are the best Men to lean upon those things, and stay themselves upon them! Thus did *Israel* stay themselves upon *Egypt*, as a feeble Man would lean upon his Staff; but God suffered it both to fail them, and wound them, *Ezek. 29. 6, 7, 8.* So for single Persons, how apt are they to depend upon their sensible Supports? Thus we lean on our Relations, and the inward Thoughts of our Hearts are, that they shall be to us so many Springs of Comfort to refresh us throughout our Lives; but God will shew us by his Providence our Mistake and Error in these things. Thus an Husband is smitten, to draw the Soul of a Wife nearer to God, in dependance upon him, *1 Tim. 5. 5.* So for Children, we are apt to say of this or that Child, as *Lamech* of *Noah*, *Gen. 5. 29.* *This same shall comfort us*; but the Wind passes over these Flowers, and they are withered, to teach us, that our Happiness is not bound up in these Enjoyments. So for our *Estates*, when the World smiles upon us, and we have got a warm Nest, how do we prophesy of Rest and Peace in those Acquisitions, minding with good *Baruch*, great things for our selves; but Providence by a particular or general Calamity overturns our Projects, as *Jer. 45. 4, 5.* and all this to reduce our Hearts from the Creature, to God, our only Rest.

(7.) Corruption discovers its Strength in good Men, by their adherence to things below, and lothness to go hence. This often proceeds from the engaging Enjoyments and pleasant Fruitions we have here below. Providence mortifies this Inclination in the Saints, (1.) By killing those

ensna-

ensnaring Comforts before-hand, making all or most of our pleasant things to die before us. (2.) By imbittering this World to us, by the troubles of it. (3.) By making Life undesirable, through the Pains and Infirmities we feel in the Body, and so loosing our Root, in order to our more easy Fall by the fatal Stroke.

And thus I have finished the Second General Head; but before I pass from this, I cannot but make a pause, and desire you, with me, to stand in an holy Amazement, and wonder at the Dealings of God with such poor Worms as we are! Surely God deals familiarly with Men! his Condescensions to his own Clay are astonishing! All that I shall note at present about it, shall be under these three Heads, wherein I find the Matter of my present Meditations summed up by the Psalmist, Psal. 144. 3. *Lord, what is Man, that thou takest knowledge of him? or the Son of Man, that thou makest account of him?* And in this Scripture you have represented,

1. The immense and transcendent Greatness of God, who is infinitely above us and all our Thoughts, Job 11. 7, 8, 9. *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto Perfection? It is as high as Heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than Hell, what canst thou know? The Measure thereof is longer than the Earth, and broader than the Sea.* 2 Chron. 2. 6. *The Heaven, and Heaven of Heavens cannot contain him.* Exod. 15. 11. *He is glorious in Holiness, fearful in Praises, doing Wonders.* When the Scripture speaks of him comparatively, see how it expresses his Greatness, Isa. 40. 15, 16, 17. *Behold the Nations are as the Drop of a Bucket, and are counted as the small Dust of the Balance: Behold he taketh up the Isles as a very little thing.*

ing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn; nor the Beasts thereof sufficient for a Burnt-offering. All Nations before him are as nothing, and they are accounted to him less than nothing and Vanity. When the holiest Men have addrest themselves to him, see with what Humility and deep Adoration they have spoken of him and to him! *Isa. 6. 5. Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a Man of unclean Lips, and I will dwell in the midst of a People of unclean Lips: for mine Eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.* Nay, what Respects the very Angels of Heaven have of that Glorious Majesty, you may see, *Ver. 2, 3. Each one had six Wings, with twain he covered his Face, and with twain he covered his Feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole Earth is full of his Glory.*

The Baseness, Vileness, and utter Unworthiness of Man, yea the holiest and best of Men, before God, *Psal. 39. 5. Verily every Man, at his best Estate, is altogether Vanity.* Every Man, take where you will, and every Man, in his best Estate, or standing in his freshest Glory, is, not only *Vanity*, but altogether *Vanity*. *Col Adam col Hebel, every Man is every Vanity.* For do but consider the best of Men in their *Extraction*, in their *Constitution*, and in their outward *Condition*.

(1.) In their *Extraction*, *Eph. 2. 3. By Nature Children of Wrath, even as others.* The Blood that runs in our Veins is as much tainted as theirs in Hell.

(2.) Consider them in their *Constitution* and natural Temper, and it is no better, yea, in many a worse Temper than in Reprobates: and tho Grace depose Sin in them from the Throne; yet O what offensive and God-provoking Corruptions daily break out of the best Hearts. (3.)

Divine Conduct: Or,

(3.) Consider them in their *outward Conditions* and they are inferiour (for the most part) to others, 1 Cor. 1. 26, 27, 28, &c. and *Matth. 11. 25. I thank thee, O Father (saith Christ) that thou hast hid these things from the Wise and Prudent, and hast revealed them unto Babes.*

And now let us consider, and admire, that ever this Great and Blessed God should be so much concerned as you have heard he is in all his Providences about such vile despicable Worms as we are! He needs us not, but is perfectly blessed and happy in himself without us. We can add nothing to him, *Job 22. 2. Can a Man be profitable to God?* No, the holiest of Men add nothing to him; yet see how great account he makes of us. For,

1. Doth not his eternal electing Love bespeak the dear account he made of us, *Eph. 1. 4, 5. How antient, how free, and how astonishing is this Act of Grace!* This is that Design which all Providences are in pursuit of, and will not rest till they have executed.

2. Doth not the Gift of his *only Son* out of his Bosom speak this Truth, That God makes great account of this vile thing Man? Never was Man so magnified before. If *David* could say, *Psal. 8. 3. When I consider the Heavens, the Work of thy Hands, the Moon and Stars which thou hast ordained, Lord, what is Man?* How much more may we say, When we consider thy Son, that lay in thy Bosom, his infinite Excellency, and unspeakable Dearness to thee; Lord, what is Man, that such a *Christ* should be delivered to Death for him! for *him*, and not for fallen *Angels*! *Heb. 2. 19. for him*, when in a State of Enmity with God! *Rom. 5. 8.*

3. Doth

3. Doth not the Assiduity of his providential Care for us, speak his Esteem of us? *Isa. 27.*

3. *Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. He withdraweth not his eye from the righteous, Job 36. 7.*

No, not a Moment all their Days; for did he so, a thousand Mischiefs in that Moment would rush in upon him, and ruin him.

4. Doth not the Tenderness of his Providence speak his Esteem of us? *Isa. 66. 13. As one whom his Mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. He comforts his (viz. by refreshing Providences) as an indulgent Mother her tender Child. So Isa. 31.*

5. *As Birds flying, viz. to their Nests, when their young are in danger, so he defends his. No sympathy* Tenderness in the Creature can shadow forth the tender Bowels of the Creator.

5. Doth not the Variety of the Fruits of his Providence speak it? *Lam. 3. 23. Our Mercies are new every Morning. See Psal. 40. 5. It is a Fountain from which do stream forth spiritual and temporal, ordinary and extraordinary, publick and personal Mercies, Mercies without Number.*

6. Doth not the Ministration of *Angels* in the Providential Kingdom speak it? *Heb. 1. ult. Are they not all ministering Spirits sent forth, &c.*

7. Doth not the Providence which this Day calls us to celebrate the Memory of, bespeak the great Account God hath for his People? O if not so, why had we not been given up as a Prey *Preached* to their Teeth? See *Psal. 124. If the Lord had not Novem. 5.* been on our side then wicked Men, there compar'd to Fire, Water, wild Beasts, had devour'd us. O blessed be God for that teeming Providence that hath already brought forth more than seventy Years Liberty and Peace to the Church of God. I shall move in behalf of this Providence, that you would

would do by it, as the Jews by their *Purim*, *Esth.* 9. 27, 28. and the rather, because we seem now to be as near Danger by the same Enemy as ever since that time: And if such ^{is} Mercy as this be forgotten, God may say as *Judges* 10. 13. *I will deliver you no more.*

The Third General Head.

Having proved the Concernments of the People of God to be conducted by the Care of special Providence, and given Instances in the ten last named Heads, what Influence Providence hath upon those Interests and Concerns of theirs among the rest; we come in the next place to prove it to be the Duty of the People of God, to reflect upon these Performances of Providence for them, at all times, but especially in times of Straits and Troubles.

This I will evidence to be your unquestionable Duty, by the following Particulars.

1. This is our Duty, because God hath expressly commanded it, and called his People to make the most serious Reflections, and Animadversions upon his Works, whether of Mercy or Judgment. So when that dreadfulest of all Judgments was executed upon his professing People for their Apostasie from God, and God had removed the Symbols of his Presence from among them, the rest are bid to go, (*i. e.*) by their Meditations, (to send at least their Thoughts) to *Shiloh*, and see what God did to it, *Jer.* 7. 12. So for Mercies, God calls us to consider and review them, *Micah* 6. 5. *Remember O my People from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the Faithfulness of the Lord,* 9. d. if you reflect not upon that signal Providence, my Faithfulness will be covered, and your Unfaithfulness discover'd. So for God's Works of Providence

vidence about the Creatures, we are called to consider them, that we may prop up our Faith by those Considerations for our own Supplies, *Matth. 6. 28.* consider the Fowls and Lillies.

2. It's plain, that this is our Duty, because the Neglect of it is every where in Scripture condemned as a Sin. To be of an heedless inobservant Temper is very displeasing to God; and so much appears by that Scripture, *Isa. 26. 11.* *Lord when thy Hand is lifted up, they will not see.* Nay, it is a Sin, which God threatens and denounces Woe against in his Word, *Psal. 28. 4, 5.* and *Isa. 5. 12,* 13. Yea, God not only threatens, but smites Men with visible Judgments for this Sin, *Job 34. 26, 27.*

And for this End and Purpose it is, that the Holy Ghost hath affixed those Notes of Attention to the Narrative of the Works of Providence in Scripture, all which do invite and call Men to a due and dear Observation of them. So in that great and celebrated Work of Providence, in delivering *Israel* out of *Egyptian* Bondage, you find a Note of Attention twice affixed to it, *Exod. 2. 2, 9.* So when that daring Enemy, *Rabsheka* (that put *Hexekiah* and all the People into such a Consternation) was defeated by Providence, there is a Note of Attention prefix'd to that Providence, *2 Kings 19. 7.* *Behold, I will send a Blast upon him, &c.* So when God glorifies his Wisdom and Power, in delivering his People from their Enemies, and ensnaring them in the Works of their own Hands, a double Note of Attention is affixed to that double Work of Providence, *Psal. 9. 16.* *Higgai-on selah.* So at the opening of every Seal which contains a remarkable Series or Branch of Providence, how particularly is Attention commanded to every one of them, *Rev. 6. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.*
Come

Come and see, come and see. All these are very use-
less and superfluous Additions in Scripture, if no
such Duty lies upon us. See *Psal.* 66. 5.

4. Without due Observation of the Work of
Providence, no Praise can be render'd to God for
any of them. Praise and Thanksgiving for Mer-
cies depend upon this Act of Observation of them,
and cannot be performed without it. *Psal.* 107.
is spent in Narratives of God's Providential Care
of Men. To his People in straits, *ver.* 4, 5, 6.
To Prisoners in their Bonds, *ver.* 10, 11, 12. To
Men that lie languishing upon Beds of Sickness,
ver. 17, 18, 19. To Seamen upon the stormy O-
cean, *ver.* 23, &c. To Men in Times of Famine,
ver. 33, to *ver.* 40. Yea, his Providence is dis-
played in all those Changes that fall out in the
World, debasing the high, and exalting the low,
ver. 40, 41. and at every Paragraph Men are still
called upon to praise God for each of these Pro-
vidences: but *ver. ult.* shews you what a necessa-
ry Ingredient to that Duty, Observation is, *Who-
so is wise, and will observe these things; even they
shall understand the loving Kindness of the Lord.* So
that of Necessity God must be defrauded of his
Praise, if this Duty be neglected.

5. Without this, we lose the Usefulness and Be-
nefit of all the Works of God for us or others,
which would be an unspeakable Loss indeed to
us. This is the Food our Faith lives upon in
Days of Distress, *Psal.* 74. 14. *Thou breakest the
Horns of Leviathan in Pieces, and gavest him to be
Meat to the People inhabiting the Wilderness; (i.e.)*
Food to their Faith. From Providences past,
Saints use to argue to fresh and new ones to
come. So David, *1 Sam.* 17. 37. *The Lord that
delivered me out of the Paw of the Lion, and out of*
the

the Paw of the Bear, he will deliver me out of the Hand of this Philistine. So Paul, 2 Cor. 1. 10. *Who hath delivered, and in whom also we trust, that he will yet deliver.* If these be forgotten or not considered, the Hands of Faith hang down. See *Matth. 16. 9. How is it that ye do not remember, neither consider?* This is a Topick from which the Saints had used to draw their Arguments in Prayer for new Mercies. As *Moses, Numb. 14. 19.* when he prays for continued or new Pardons for the People, he argues from what was past, *As thou hast forgiven them from Egypt until now.* So the Church, *Isa. 51. 9, 10.* argues for new Providences; upon the same ground *Moses* pleaded for new Pardons.

It is a vile slighting of God, not to observe what of himself he manifests in his Providences. For in all Providences, especially in some, he comes nigh to us. He doth so in his Judgments, *Mal. 3. 5. I will come nigh to you in Judgment.* He comes nigh in Mercies also, *Psal. 145. 18. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, &c.* Yea, he is said to visit us by his Providence when he corrects, *Hosea 9. 7.* and when he saves and delivers, *Psal. 106. 4.* These Visitations of God preserve our Spirits, *Job 10. 12.* And it is a wonderful Condescension in the great God to visit us so often, *Job 7. 18. every Morning and every Moment.* But not to take notice of it, is a vile and brutish Contempt of God, *Isa. 1. 3. Zeph. 3. 2.* You would not do so by a Man for whom you have any respect. It's the Character of the wicked, not to regard God's Favours, *Isa. 26. 10.* or Frowns, *Jer. 5. 3.*

7. In a word, Men can never order their Addresses to God in Prayer, suitable to their Conditions,

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without due *observation* of his Providences. Your Prayers are to be suitable to your Conditions: sometimes we are called to Praise, sometimes to Humiliation. In the way of his Judgments you are to wait for him, *Isa.* 26. 8. to prepare to meet him, *Zeph.* 2. 1, 2. *Amos* 4. 12. Now your Business is to turn away his Anger, which you see approaching. And sometimes you are called to praise him for Mercies received, *Isa.* 12. 1, 2. but then you must first observe them.

Thus you find the Matter of *David's* Psalms still varied, according to the Providences that befell him: but an inobservant heedless Spirit can never do it. And thus you have the Grounds of the Duty briefly represented. We pass on to,

The Fourth General Head.

Let us next (according to our Method proposed) proceed to shew, in what manner we are to reflect upon the *Performances of Providence* for us. And certainly, it is not every slight and transient Glance, nor every cold historical, unaffected Rehearsal, or Recognition of his Providences towards you, that will pass with God, for a discharge of this great Duty. No, no, it is another manner of Business than the most of Men understand it to be. O that we were but acquainted with this heavenly spiritual Exercise! how sweet would it make our Lives! how light would it make our Burdens! Ah Sirs! you live estranged from the Pleasure of the Christian Life, while you live in the ignorance or neglect of this Duty. Now to lead you up to this heavenly, sweet and profitable Exercise, I will beg your attention to the following Directions.

The First Direction.

Labour to get as full and thorough Recognitions of
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the Providences of God about you, from first to last, as you are able. O fill your Hearts with the Thoughts of him and his Ways. If a single Act of Providence be so ravishing and transporting, what would many such be, if they were presented together to the view of the Soul? If one Star be so beautiful to behold, what is a Constellation! Let your Reflection therefore upon the Acts and Workings of Providence for you, be full extensively and intensively.

(1.) Let them be as *extensively* full as may be. Search backward into all the Performances of Providence throughout your Lives. So did *Asaph* in *Psal. 77. 11, 12.* *I will remember the Works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy Wonders of old: I will meditate of all thy Works, and talk of thy Doings.* He laboured to recover and revive the antient Providences of God's Mercies many years past, and suck a fresh Sweetness out of them by new Reviews of them. Ah, Sirs, let me tell you, there is not such a pleasant *History* for you to read in all the World, as the *History* of your own Lives, if you would but sit down, and record to your selves from the beginning hitherto, what God hath been to you, and done for you; what signal Manifestations, and Out-breakings of his Mercy, Faithfulness and Love, there have been in all the Conditions you have past through: if your Hearts do not melt before you have gone half through that History, they are hard Hearts indeed. *My Father, the Guide of my Youth.*

(2.) Let them be as *intensively* full as may be. Let not your Thoughts swim like *Feathers* upon the Surface of the Waters, but sink like *Lead* to the bottom. *The Works of the Lord are great, sought out of them that have pleasure therein, Psal. 111. 2.*

Not that I think it feasible to sound the Depth of Providence by our short Line, *Psal. 77. 19. Thy Way is in the Sea, and thy Path in the great Waters, and thy Footsteps are not known*; but it's our Duty to dive as far as we can, and to admire the Depth, when we cannot touch the Bottom. It is in our viewing Providences, as it was with *Elijah's* Servant, when he looked out for Rain, *1 Kings 18. 44.* he went out once, and viewed the Heavens, and saw nothing; but the *Prophet* bids him go again and again, and look upon the Face of Heaven seven times; and when he had done so, What now, saith the *Prophet*? O now, saith he, *I see a Cloud rising like a Man's Hand*; and then, keeping his Eye upon it intent, he sees the whole Face of Heaven covered with Clouds. So you may look upon some Providences once and again, and see little or nothing in them; but look *seven times*, i. e. *meditate often* upon it, and you shall see its increasing Glory, like that increasing Cloud.

There are divers things to be distinctly pondered and valued in one single Providence, before you can judge the amount and worth of it: As, (1.) The *Seasonableness* of Mercy may give it a very great Value. When it shall be timed so opportunely, and fall out in such a nick, as may make it a thousand-fold more considerable to you than the same Mercy would have been at another time. Thus when our Wants are suffered to grow to an extremity, and all visible Hopes fail, then to have relief given in, wonderfully enhances the Price of such a Mercy, *Isa. 41. 17, 18.*

(2.) The *peculiar Care* and Kindness of Providence to us, is a Consideration which exceedingly heightens the Mercy in it self, and endears it to

The Mystery of Providence.

121

us. So, when in general Calamities upon the World, we are exempted by the favour of Providence, covered under its Wings; when God shall call to us in evil Days, *Come, my People, enter thou into thy Chambers*, as it is in *Isa. 26. 19, 20*. When such *Promises* shall be fulfilled to us in times of Want and Famine, as *Psal. 33. 18, 19*. When others are abandoned and exposed to Misery, who have every way as much, it may be much more visible Security against it; and yet they delivered up, and we saved: Oh, how endearing are such Providences! *Psal. 91. 7, 8*.

(3.) The *Introductiveness* of a Providence is of special regard and consideration, and by no means to be neglected by us. There are leading Providences, which how slight and trivial soever they may seem in themselves, yet in this respect justly challenge the first Rank among Providential Favours to us; because they usher in a Multitude of other Mercies, and draw a blessed Train of happy Consequences after them. Such a Providence was that of *Jesse's* sending *David* with Provisions to his Brethren that lay encamped in the Army, *1 Sam. 17. 17*. And thus every Christian may furnish himself out of his own stock of Experience, if he will but reflect, and consider, the Place where he is, the Relations that he hath, and the Way by which he was led into them.

(4.) The *Instruments* employed by Providence for you, are of special consideration. And the Finger of God is clearly seen by us when we pursue that Meditation. For,

Sometimes great Mercies shall be conveyed to us by very improbable Means, and more probable ones laid aside. A *Stranger* shall be stirred up to do that for you, which your near Relations

in Nature had no Power or Will to do for you. *Jonathan*, a meer Stranger to *David*, clave closer to him, and was more friendly and useful to him, than his own Brethren, who despised and slighted him. Ministers have found more Kindness and Respect from Strangers, than their own People, that are more obliged to them, *Mark* 6. 4. *A Prophet (saith Christ) is not without Honour, save in his own Country, and among his own Kin, and in his own House.*

Sometimes by the hands of *Enemies*, as well as Strangers, *Rev.* 12. 16. *The Earth helped the Woman.* God hath bowed the Hearts of many wicked Men, to shew great Kindness to his People, *Acts* 28. 2.

Sometimes God makes use of Instruments for good to his People, who designed nothing but Evil and Mischief to them. Thus *Joseph's* Brethren were instrumental to his Advancement, in that very thing, wherein they designed his Ruin, *Gen.* 50. 20.

(5.) The *Design* and *Scope* of Providence must not escape our thorough Consideration, what the aim and level of Providence is. And truly this, of all others, is the most warming and melting Consideration. You have the general account of the aim of all Providences, in *Rom.* 8. 28. *And we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God.* A thousand friendly Hands are at work for them, to promote and bring about their Happiness. O, this is enough to sweeten the bitterness of Providence to us, that we know it shall turn to our Salvation, *Phil.* 1. 19.

(6.) The *Respect* and *Relation* Providence bears to our *Prayers*, is of singular consideration, and a most taking and sweet Meditation. Prayer honours

nours Providence, and Providence honours Prayer. Great notice is taken of this in Scripture, *Gen. 24. 45. Dan. 9. 20. Acts 12. 12.* You have had the *very Petitions* you asked of him. Providences have born the *very Signatures* of your Prayers upon them. O how affectingly sweet are such Mercies?

The Second Direction.

In all your Observation of Providence, have special respect to that Word of God, which is fulfilled and made good to you thereby.

This is a clear Truth, that all Providences have relation to the written Word. Thus *Solomon* in his Prayer, acknowledges, that the Promises and Providences of God went along step by step with his Father *David* all his Days; and that his Hand (put there for his Providence) had fulfilled whatever his Mouth had spoken, *1 Kings 8. 24.* So *Joshua* in like manner acknowledges, that *not one good thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord had spoken*, *Jos. 23. 14.* He had carefully observed what relation the *Works* of God had to his *Word*. He compared them together, and found an exact Harmony; and so may you too, if you will compare them as he did.

This I shall the more insist upon, because it is by some *Interpreters* supposed to be the very Scope of the Text. For (as was noted in the *Explication*) they supply and fill the Sense with *que promissit*, the things which he hath promised; and so read the Text thus, *I will cry unto God most high, to God who performeth the things he hath promised, for me.*

Now though I see no reason to limit the Sense so narrowly, yet it cannot be denied, but this is an especial part of its intendment. Let us there-

Divine Conduct : Or,

fore in all our Reviews of Providence, consider, what Word of God, whether it be of Threatning, Caution, Counsel, or Promise is at any time made good to us by his Providences. And hereby a twofold excellent Advantage will result to us.

(1.) This will greatly confirm to us the Truth of the Scripture, when we shall see its truth so manifest in the Events. Certainly had *Scripture* no other Seal or Attestation, this alone would be an unanswerable Argument of its Divinity. When Men shall find in all Ages the Works of God wrought so exactly according to this Model, that we may see: As we have read or heard, so have we seen. O how great a Confirmation is here before our Eyes!

(2.) This will abundantly direct and instruct us in our present Duties under all Providences. We shall know hereby what we have to do, and how to carry our selves under all Changes of Conditions. You can learn the Voice and Errand of the *Rod* only from the Word, *Psal.* 94. 12. The Word interprets the Works of God. Providences in themselves are not a perfect Guide. They often puzzle and entangle our Thoughts; but bring them to the Word, and your Duty will be quickly manifested, as *Psal.* 73. 16, 17. *Until I went into the Sanctuary, then I understood their End:* and, not only their *End*, but his own *Duty*, to be quiet in an afflicted Condition, and not envy their Prosperity.

Well then, bring those Providences you have past through, or are now under, to the Word; and you will find your selves surrounded with a marvellous Light, and see the Verification of the Scriptures in them. I shall therefore here appeal to your Consciences, whether you have not
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found these Events of Providence falling out agreeable in all respects with the Word.

1. The Word tells you, that it is your Wisdom and Interest to keep close to its Rules, and the Duties it prescribes, that the Way of Holiness and Obedience is the wisest way, *Deut. 4. 5, 6. This is your Wisdom.*

Now let the Events of Providence speak, whether this be true or not. Certainly it will appear to be so, whether we respect our *present Comfort*, or *future Happiness*, both which we may see daily exposed by departure from Duty, and secured by keeping close to it. Let the Question be asked of the *Drunkard*, *Adulterer*, or *prophane Swearer*, when by Sin they have ruined Body, Soul, Estate and Name, whether it be their Wisdom to walk in those forbidden Paths after their own Lusts? Whether they had not better consulted their own Interest and Comfort, in keeping within the Bounds and Limits of God's Commands? And they cannot but confess, that *this their Way is their Folly. What Fruit* (saith the Apostle) *had ye in those Things, whereof you are now ashamed? For the End of those Things is Death,* *Rom. 6. 21.* Doth not the Providence of God verify upon them those Threatnings that are written, in the Experience of all Ages? *Prov. 23. 29. Prov. 23. 21. Prov. 5. 9. Job 31. 12. Prov. 5. 10.* All which Woes and Miseries they escape, that walk in God's Statutes. Look upon the ruined Estates and Bodies you may every where see, and behold the Truth of the Scriptures evidently made good in those sad Providences.

2. The Word tells you, that your departure from the way of Integrity and Simplicity, to make use of sinful Policies, shall never profit you, *1 Sam. 12. 21. Prov. 3. 5.* Let

Let the Events of Providence speak to this also, ask your own Experience, and you shall have a full Confirmation of this Truth. Did you ever leave the way of Simplicity and Integrity, and use sinful Shifts, to bring about your own Designs, and prosper in that way? Certainly God hath cursed all the Ways of Sin; and whoever finds them to thrive with them, his People shall not, *Israel* would not rely upon the Lord, but trust in the Shadow of *Egypt*; and what Advantage had they by this sinful Policy? See *Isa.* 30. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. *David* used a great deal of sinful Policy to cover his wicked Fact; but did it prosper? See 2 *Sam.* 12. 12. It is an excellent Note of *Livy*, *Consilia callida, primâ specie læta, tractatu dura, eventu tristia*. Sinful Policies in their first Appearances, are pleasant and promising, in their Management difficult, in their Event sad. Some by sinful Ways have gotten Wealth; but that Scripture hath been verified in their Experience, *Prov.* 10. 2. *Treasures of Wickedness profit nothing*. Either God hath blown upon it by a secret Curse, that it hath done them no good, or given them such Disquietness in their Consciences, that they have been forced to vomit it up, e're they could find Peace, *Job* 11. 13, 14, 15.

That which *David* gave in charge to *Solomon*, hath been found experimentally true by thousands, 1 *Chron.* 22. 12, 13. That the true way to Prosperity, is to keep close to the Rule of the Word. And that the true Reason why Men cannot prosper, is their forsaking that Rule, 2 *Chron.* 24. 20.

It's true, if God have a Purpose to destroy a Man, he may for a time suffer him to succeed and prosper in his Sin, for his greater hardening,

Job

Job 12. 6. But it is not so with those whom the Lord loves; their sinful Shifts shall never thrive with them.

3. The Word prohibits your *Trust* and *Confidence* in the *Creature*, even the greatest and most powerful among *Creatures*, *Psalms* 146. 3. It tells us, that 'tis better to trust in the Lord, than in them, *Psalms* 118. 8. It forbids our Confidence in those *Creatures* that are most nearly ally'd, and related in the Bonds of Nature to us, *Micah* 7. 5. It curseth the Man that gives that Reliance to the *Creature*, which is due to God, *Jer.* 17. 5.

Consult the Events of Providence in this Case, and see whether the Word be not verified therein? Did you ever lean upon an *Egyptian* Reed, and it did not break under you, and pierce as well as deceive you? O how often hath this been evident in our Experience! Whatsoever we have over-loved, idolized, and leaned upon, God hath from time to time broken it, and made us to see the Vanity of it; so that we find the readiest Course to be rid of our Comforts, is to set our Hearts inordinately or immoderately upon them: For our God is a jealous God, and will not part with his Glory to another. The World is full of Examples of Persons deprived of their Comforts, Husbands, Wives, Children, Estates, &c. upon this account, and by this means. If *Jonah* be over-joyed in his Gourd, a *Worm* is presently prepared to smite it. Hence it is, that so many Graves are opened for the burying of our *Idols* out of our sight. If *David* say, *My Mountain shall stand strong, I shall not be moved*; the next News he shall hear, is of Darknes and Trouble, *Psalms* 30. 6, 7. O how true and faithful do we find these Sayings of God to be! Who cannot put to his Seal, and say, *Thy Words are Truth*?

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Divine Conduct : Or,

4. The Word assures us, that Sin is the Cause and Inlet of Affliction and Sorrow, and that there is an inseparable Connection betwixt them, *Numb. 32. 23. Be sure your Sin will find you out: (i. e.)* the sad Effects and Afflictions that follow it shall find you out. So *Psalms 89. 30, 31, 32. If his Sons forsake my Law, I will visit their Iniquities with Rods.*

Enquire now at the Mouth of Providence, whether this be indeed so, according to the Reports of the Word. Ask but your own Experiences, and you shall find, that just so Providence hath ordered it all along your way. When did you grow into a secure, vain, carnal Frame, but you found some rousing, startling Providence sent to awaken you? When did you wound your Consciences with Guilt, and God did not wound you for it, in some or other of your beloved Enjoyments? Nay, so ordinary is this with God, that from the Observations of their own Frames and Ways, many Christians have fore-boded and pre-saged Troubles at hand.

I do not say, that God never afflicts his People, but for their Sin; for he may do it for their Trial, *1 Pet. 4. 12.* Nor do I say, that God follows every Sin with a Rod; for who then should stand before him? *Psalms 130. 3.* But this I say, that it's God's usual way, to visit the Sins of his People with Rods of Affliction, and this in Mercy to their Souls. Upon this account it was, that the Rod of God was upon *David* in a long Succession of Troubles upon his Kingdom and Family, after that great Prevarication of his, *2 Sam. 12. 10.* And if we could carefully search out the Seeds and Principles of those Miseries under which we or ours do groan; we should find them to be

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our own turnings aside from the Lord, according to that, *Jer. 2. 19. and Jer. 4. 18.* Have not all these Cautions and Threatnings of the Word been exactly fulfilled by Providence in your own Experience? Who can but see the infallible Truth of God in all that he hath threatned! And no less evident is the Truth of the Promises to all that will observe how Providence makes them good every Day to us; for consider,

5. How great Security God hath given to his People in the Promises, that no Man shall lose any thing by Self-denial for his sake. He hath told us, *Mark 10. 29, 30. Verily, I say unto you, there is no Man that hath left House, or Brethren, or Sisters, or Father, or Mother, or Wife, or Children, or Lands for my sake, and the Gospels; but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this Time, Houses, and Brethren, and Sisters, and Mothers, and Children, and Lands with Persecutions, and in the World to come Eternal Life.*

Tho' that vile Apostate *Julian* derided this Promise, yet thousands and ten thousands have experienced it, and do at this Day stand ready to set their Seal to it. God hath made it good to his People, not only in *Spirituals*, inward Joy, and Peace; but even in *Temporals* also: Instead of natural Relations who took care for them before, hundreds of *Christians* shall stand ready to assist and help them: So that though they have left all for *Christ*, yet they may say with the *Apostle*, *2 Cor. 6. 10. As having nothing, and yet possessing all Things.* O the admirable Care and Tenderness of Providence over those that for Conscience sake have left all, and cast themselves upon its immediate Care! Are there not at this Day to be found many so provided for, even to the

the Envy of their Enemies, and their own Admiration? Who sees not the Faithfulness of God in the Promises that hath but an Heart to trust God in them!

6. The Word of Promise assures us, that whatever Wants or Straits the Saints fall into, their God *will never leave them, nor forsake them*, Heb. 13. 5. That he *will be with them in Trouble*, Psal. 91. 15.

Summa hæc est, cum omnia bona suppedientur a deo in omnibus vitæ humanæ ordinibus nostri officii erit, in calamitatibus nos erigere confidence ratione Providentiæ divinæ. *Alfred. Theol. Catechet.* p. 192.

Consult the various Providences of your Life in this Point, and I doubt not, but you will find the Truth of these Promises as often confirmed, as you have been in Trouble. Ask your own Hearts, where, or when was it that your God forsook you, and left you to sink and perish under your Burdens? I doubt not, but most of you have been at one time or other plunged in Difficulties, Difficulties out of which you could see no way of escape by the Eye of Reason; yea, such, as it may be, staggered your Faith in the Promise, as *David's* was, 1 Sam. 27. 1. when he said, *I shall one Day perish by the Hand of Saul. All Men are Liars* (even *Samuel* himself) and yet notwithstanding all, we see him emerge out of that Sea of Trouble, and the Promises made good in every tittle to him. The like doubtless you may observe in your own Cases. Ask your own Souls the Question, and they will satisfy it. Did God abandon and cast you off in the Day of your Straits? Certainly you must belie your own Experience, if you should say so. 'Tis true, there have been some Plunges and Difficulties you have met with, wherein, (1.) You could see no way of Escape, but concluded you must perish in them. (2.) Difficulties that have staggered your Faith in the Promises, and made you doubt, whether the

Mountain of All-sufficiency would let out it self
 for your Relief. (3.) Yea, such Difficulties as have
 provoked you to murmuring and impatience, and
 thereby provoked the Lord to forsake you in your
 traits; but yet you see he did not. He hath ei-
 ther, (1.) Strengthened your Back to bear; or,
 (2.) Lightened your Burden; or, (3.) Opened
 an unexpected Door of Escape, according to that
 Promise, 1 Cor. 10. 13. so that the Evil which
 you feared came not upon you.

7. You read, that the Word of God is the only
 support and Relief to a gracious Soul in the dark
 Day of Affliction, *Psalms* 119. 50, 92. —
2 Sam. 23. 5. That for this very Purpose it was
 written, *Rom.* 15. 4. No Rules of moral Pru-
 dence, no sensual Remedies can perform that for
 us which the Word can do.

And is not this a sealed Truth, attested by a
 thousand of undeniable Experiences? Hence
 have the Saints fetcht their *Cordials*, when fainting
 under the Rod. One Word of God can do more
 than ten thousand Words of Men to relieve a di-
 stressed Soul. If Providence have at any time di-
 rected you to such Promises, as either assure you
 that the Lord will be with you in trouble, *Psalms*
 91. 15. Or that encourage you from inward
 Peace, to bear cheerfully outward Burdens, *John*
 16. 33. or satisfie you of God's Tendernefs and Mo-
 deration in his Dealings with you, *Isa.* 27. 8. Or
 that you shall reap blessed Fruits from them, *Rom.*
 8. 28. Or that clear up your Interest in God, and
 his Love under your Afflictions, *2 Sam.* 7. 14. Oh,
 what sensible Ease and Relief ensues! How light
 is your Burden, compared with what it was before?

8. The Word tells us, that there is no such way
 to improve our Estates, as to lay them out with

a chearful Liberality for God; and that our withholding our Hands, when God and Duty calls to distribute, will not be for our Advantage. See *Prov. 11. 25. Isa. 32. 8. Prov. 19. 17. Prov. 11. 24.*

Consult Providence now, and you shall find it in all Respects according to the Report of the Word. O how true is the Scripture Testimony herein! There are many thousand Witnesses now living, that can set their Seals to both Parts of this Proposition. What Men save (as they count saving) with one Hand, Providence scatters by another Hand: And what they scatter abroad with a liberal Hand and single Eye for God, is surely repaid to them or theirs. Never did any Man lose by distributing for God. He that lends to the poor *fæneratur Domino*, as some expound that Text, puts his Money to Interest to the Lord. Some have observed how Providence hath doubled all they have laid out for God, in Ways unexpected to them.

9. The Word assures us, that the best Expedient for a Man to settle his own Interest in the Consciences and Affections of Men, is to direct his Ways, so as to please the Lord, *Prov. 16. 7.* and doth not Providence confirm it? This the three *Jews* found by Experience, *Dan. 3. 28, 29.* and so did *Daniel*, Chap. 6. Ver. 20, 21, 22. This kept up *Jobn's* Reputation in the Conscience of *Herod*, *Mark 6. 20.* So it fell out, when *Constantius* made that exploratory Decree; those that were Conscientious were preferred, and those that changed their Religion expelled. Never did any Man lose at last by his Fidelity.

10. The written Word tells us, that the best Expedient to inward Peace and Tranquility of Mind under puzzling and distracting Troubles, is to
commit

commit our selves and our Case to the Lord ; so you read, *Psalm 37. 5, 6, 7.* and *Prov. 16. 3.*

And as you have read in the Word, so you have found it in your own Experience. Oh, what a Burden is off your Shoulders, when you have resigned the Case to God! Then doth Providence issue your Affairs comfortably for you. The Difficulty is soon over, when the Heart is brought to this.

Thus you see, how Scriptures are fulfilled by Providence in these few Instances I have given of it. Compare them in all other Cases, and you shall find the same : For all the Lines of Providence lead from the Scripture, and return thither again, and do most visibly begin and end there.

The Fourth Direction.

In all your Reviews and Observations of Providence, be sure that you eye God as the Author or Orderer of them all, Prov. 3. 6.

1. In all the comfortable Providences of your Lives, eye God as the Author or Donor of them. Remember he is the Father of Mercies, that begets every Mercy for you, *2 Cor. 1. 3.* The God of all Comfort, without whose Order no Mercy or Comfort can come to your Hands. And think it not enough thus to acknowledge him in a general Way ; but when you receive Mercies, take special Notice of the following Particulars.

(1.) Eye the Care of God for you, *1 Pet. 5. 7.* *He careth for you, your Father knows you have need of these Things,* *Mat. 6. 32.* It is but to acquaint him what you want, and your Wants are supplied, *Phil. 4. 6.* *μη μεριμνᾶτε,* torture not your selves about it : You have a Father that cares for you.

(2.) Eye the Wisdom of God, in the way of dispensing his Mercies to you, how suitably they

are ordered to your Condition, and how seasonably. When one Comfort is cut off and removed, another is raised up in its room. Thus *Isaac* was comforted in *Rebekah* after his *Mother's* Death, *Gen* 24. 67.

(3.) Eye the Free Grace of God in them, yea see Riches of Grace in every bequest of Comfort to so vile and unworthy Creatures as you are. See your selves over-topt by the least of all your Mercies, *Gen* 32. 10. *I am not worthy of the least*, said *Jacob*.

(4.) Eye the Condescension of God, to your Requests for those Mercies, *Psalms* 34. 6. This is the sweetest Bit in any Enjoyment, in which a Man can sensibly relish the Return and Answer of his Prayers, and greatly inflames the Soul's Love to God, *Psalms* 116. 1:

(5.) Eye the Design and End of God in all your Comforts. Know that it is not sent to satisfy the Cravings of your sensual Appetite, but to quicken and enable you for a more chearful Discharge of your Duty, *Deut* 28. 47.

(6.) Eye the Way and Method in which your Mercies are conveyed to you. They all flow to you through the Blood of *Christ* and Covenant of Grace, *1 Cor* 3. 22, 23. Mercies derive their Sweetness from the Channel through which they run to us.

(7.) Eye the distinguishing Goodness of God, in all the comfortable Enjoyments of your Lives. How many thousand better than you are denied those Comforts? See *Heb* 11. 37.

(8.) Eye them all as Comforts appointed to refresh you in your way to far better and greater Mercies than themselves. The best Mercies are still reserved till last, and all these are introductive to better.

2. In all the sad and afflictive Providences that befall you, eye God as the Author and Orderer of them also. So he represents himself to us, *Jer. 18. 11. Behold, I create Evil, and devise a Device against you.* And *Amos 3. 6. Is there Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it?* More particularly,

1. Set before you the *Sovereignty of God*. Eye him as a Being infinitely superior to you, at whose Pleasure you and all you have is, *Psalms 115. 3.* which is the most conclusive Reason and Argument of Submission, *Psal. 46. 10.* For if we, and all we have, proceeded from his Will, how equal is it, that we be resigned up to it? It is not many Years ago since we were not, and when it pleased him to bring us upon the Stage of Action, we had no Liberty of indenting with him, on what Terms we would come into the World; or refuse to be, except we might have our Being on such Terms as we desired. His Sovereignty is gloriously displayed in his *Eternal Decrees* and *Temporal Providences*. He might have put you into what Rank of Creatures he pleased. He might have made you the most despicable Creatures, *Worms* or *Toads*: Or, if Men, the most vile, abject and miserable among Men: And when you had run through all the Miseries of this Life, have damned you to Eternity, made you miserable for ever, and all this without any Wrong to you. And shall not this quiet us under the common Afflictions of this Life?

2. Set the *Grace and Goodness* of God before you in all afflictive Providences. O see him passing by you in the cloudy and dark Day, proclaiming his Name, *The Lord, the Lord merciful and gracious.* There are two sorts of Mercies that are seldom eclipsed.

eclipsed by the darkest Affliction that befalls the Saints in their temporal Concerns, *sc. sparing Mercy* in this World, and *saving Mercy* in that to come. It's not so bad now as it might, and we deserved it should be, and it will be better hereafter. This the Church observed, and reasoned her self quiet from it, *Lam. 3. 22.* Hath he taken some? he might have taken all. Are we afflicted? It's Mercy we are not destroyed. Oh if we consider what temporal Mercies are yet spared, and what Spiritual Mercies are bestowed, and yet continued to us, we shall find cause to admire Mercy, rather than complain of Severity.

3. Eye the Wisdom of God in all your Afflictions, behold it in the choice of the *kind* of your Affliction, this, and not another: The *Time*, now, and not at another Season: The *Degree*, in this measure only, and not in a greater: The *Support* afforded you under it, not left altogether helpless. The *Issue*, to which it's over-ruled, it's to your Good, not Ruin. Look upon all these, and then ask thy Heart that Question God ask'd *Jonah*. *Dost thou well to be angry?* Surely, when you consider all, what need you had of these Rods, that your Corruptions will require all this, it may be much more to mortify them; that without the perishing of these things, you might have perished for ever; you will see great Reason to be quiet and well satisfied under the Hand of God.

4. Set the *Faithfulness* of the Lord before you under the saddest Providences. So did *David*. *Psalms 119. 75.* This is according to his Covenant Faithfulness, *Psalms 89. 32.* Hence it is, that the Lord will not withhold a Rod when need requires it, *1 Pet. 1. 6.* Nor will he forsake his People under the Rod, when he inflicts it, *2 Cor. 11. 9.*

Oh what Quietness will this breed ! I see my God will not lose my Heart, if a Rod can prevent it ; he had rather hear me groan here, than howl hereafter : His Love is judicious, not fond : He consults my *Good* rather than my *Ease*.

5. Eye the *All-sufficiency* of God in the Day of Affliction. See enough in him still, whatever be gone. Here is the *Fountain* still as full as ever, though this or that *Pipe* be cut off, which was wont to convey somewhat of it to me. O Christians, can't you make up any Loss this Way ? Can't you see more in God than in any or all the Creature Comforts you have lost ? With what Eyes then do you look upon God ?

6. Lastly, Eye the *Immutability* of God. Look on him as the Rock of Ages, James 1. 17. *The Father of Lights, with whom is no Variableness, nor shadow of Turning.* Eye Jesus Christ, as the same, yesterday, to day, and for ever. Oh how quietly will you then behave your selves under the Changes of Providence ? It may be, two or three Days have made a sad Change in your Condition : The Death of a dear Relation hath turned all things upside down ; That Place is empty where lately they were, as it is, Job 7. 10. *His place shall know him no more :* Well, but God is what he was, and where he was : Time shall make no Change upon him, as it is in Isa. 40. 6, 7, 8. *The Grass withereth, the Flower fadeth, but the Word of the Lord abideth for ever.* Oh how composing are those Views of God to our Spirits under dark Providences.

The Fifth Direction.

Lastly, *Work up your Hearts to those Frames, and exercise those Affections which the several Providences of God that are versant about you call*

for, Eccles. 7. 14. Suit your selves to answer the Design and End of God in all Providences. As there are various Affections planted in your Souls, so are there several Graces planted in those Affections, and several Providences appointed to draw forth, and exercise these Graces.

1. When the Providences of God are sad, and afflictive either upon the Church in general, or your Families and Persons in particular, *then it is seasonable for you to exercise godly Sorrow and Humility of Spirit*: For in that Day, and by those Providences God doth call to it, *Isa. 22. 12. Micab 6. 9.* Now, sensitive Pleasure and natural Joy, is out of season, *Ezek. 21. 10. Should we then make Mirth*, If there be either, (1.) A filial Spirit in us, we cannot be light and vain, when our Father is angry; or, (2.) If any real Sense of the Evil of Sin which provokes God's Anger, we must be heavy hearted when God is smiting for it; or, (3.) If any Sense and Compassion for the Miseries that Sin brings upon the World, it will make us to say with David, Psalm 119. 158. *I beheld the Transgressors and was grieved.* 'Tis sad to consider the Miseries that they pull down upon themselves in this World and that to come. (4.) If there be any care in us to prevent utter Ruin, and stop God in the Way of his Anger, we know this is the Means to do it, *Amos 4. 12.*

How sad and dismal soever the Face of Providence be, yet still maintain spiritual Joy and Comfort in God under all. Though there be no Herd in the Stall (said Habakkuk, chap. 3. 17.) yet will I rejoyce in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my Salvation.

There are two sorts of Comforts, *Natural and Sensitive, Divine and Spiritual.* There is a time when it becomes Christians to exercise both; so

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Ebb. 9. 22. And there is a Time when the former is to be suspended and laid by, *Psalms* 137. 2. But there is no Season, wherein spiritual Joy and Comfort in God is unseasonable, as appears by those Scriptures, *1 Thess.* 5. 16. *Phil.* 4. 4. This spiritual Joy or Comfort, is nothing else but the Cheeriness of our Heart in God, and the Sense of our Interest in him, and in his Promises. And it's sure, that no Providence can render this unseasonable to a Christian. Let us suppose the most afflicted and calamitous State a Christian can be incident to, yet,

(1.) Why should sad Providence make him lay by his Comforts in God? When as those are but for a Moment, but these Eternal, *2 Cor.* 4. 17.

(2.) Why should we lay by our Joy in God, upon the account of sad Providences without, when at the very worst and lowest Ebb, the Saints have infinitely more Cause to rejoyce, than to be cast down? There's more in one of their Mercies to comfort them, than in all their Troubles to deject them. All your Losses are but as the Loss of a Farthing to a Prince, *Rom.* 8. 18.

(3.) Why should they be sad, as long as their God is with them in all their Troubles? As *Christ* said, *Matth.* 9. 15. *Can the Children of the Bride-chamber be sad, whilst the Bridegroom is with them?* So say I, Can the Soul be sad, whilst God is with it? Oh methinks, that one Promise, *Psalms* 91. 15. *I will be with him in Trouble,* should bear you up under all Burdens. Let them be cast down, that have no God in Trouble to turn to.

(4.) Why should they be sad, as long as no outward Dispensation of Providence, (be it never so sad) can be interpreted as a Mark or Sign of God's Hatred or Enmity, *Eccl.* 9. 2, 3. *There is*

one Event to the Righteous and Wicked. Indeed, if it were a Signification of the Lord's Wrath against a Man, it would justifie our Dejection; but this cannot be so: His Heart is full of Love, whilst the Face of Providence is full of Frowns.

(5.) Why should we be cast down under sad Providences, whilst we have so great Security, that even by the Hands of these Providences God will do us good, and all these things shall *turn to our Salvation?* Rom. 8. 28. By these God is but killing your Lusts, weaning your Hearts from a vain World, preventing Temptations, and exciting your Desires after Heaven; this is all the Hurt they shall do you, and shall that sadden us?

(6.) Why should we lay by our Joy in God, when as the Change of our Condition is so nigh? It's but a little while, and Sorrows shall flee away: You shall never suffer more: *God will wipe away all Tears,* Rev. 7. 17. Well then, you see there's no Reason upon the account of Providence, to give up your Joy and Comfort in God. But if you will maintain it under all Providences, then be careful,

(1.) To clear up your Interest in, and Title to God. *Faith* may be separated from Comfort, but *Assurance* cannot.

(2.) Mortifie your inordinate Affections to earthly Things. This makes Providences that deprive and cross us so heavy. Mortifie your Opinion and Affection, and you sensibly lighten your Affliction. It is strong Affection that makes strong Affliction.

(3.) Dwell much upon the Meditation of the Lord's near Approach; and then all these Things will seem but Trifles to you. *Let your Moderation be known unto all Men, the Lord is at Hand.*

2. *Exercise Heavenly-mindedness, and keep your Hearts upon Things Eternal, under all the Providences with which the Lord exercises you in this World,* Gen. 6. 9. Noab walked with God, yet met with as sad Providences in his Day, as any Man that ever lived since his Time. But alas! we find most Providences, rather *Stops* than *Steps* in our Walk with God. If we be under comfortable Providences, how sensual, wanton and worldly do our Hearts grow! And if sad Providences befall us, how dedolent or distracted are we! And this comes to pass partly through the *Narrowness*, but mostly, through the *Deceitfulness* of our Spirits. Our Hearts are narrow, and know not how to manage two Businessses of such different Natures, as Earthly and Heavenly Matters are without Detriment to one. *Pectora nostra duas curas non admittunt.* But certainly such a Frame of Spirit is attainable that will enable us to keep on in an even and steddý Course with God, whatever befall us. Others have attained it, and why not we? Prosperous Providences are for the most part a dangerous State to the Soul. The *Moon* never suffers an *Eclipse*, but at full; yet *Jehosaphat's* Grace suffered no *Eclipse* from the Fulness of his outward Condition, who *had Riches in abundance, and his Heart was lifted up in the way of God's Commandments*, 2 Chron. 17. 5, 6. *David's* Life was as full of Cares, Turmoils, and Incumbrances, as most Men we read of; yet how spiritual the Temper of his Heart was, that excellent *Book of Psalms*, (which was mostly composed amidst those Distractions) will acquaint us. The *Apostles* were cast into as great Necessities, and suffered as hard things, as ever Men did; yet how raised and heavenly their Spirits were amidst all,

all, who sees not? And certainly, if it were not possible to maintain Heavenly-mindedness in such a State and Posture of Affairs, God would never exercise any of his People with such Providences: He would never give you so much of the World to lose your Hearts in the Love of it, or so little to distract you with the Cares of it. If therefore we were more deeply sanctified, and the Tendencies of our Hearts Heaven-ward more ardent and vigorous; if we were more mortified to earthly things, and cou'd but keep our due Distance from them; our outward Conditions would not at this rate draw forth and exercise our inward Corruptions, nor would we hazard the Loss of so sweet an Enjoyment as our Fellowship with God is, for the sake of any Concernment our Bodies have on Earth.

4. Under all Providences maintain a contented Heart with what the Lord allots you, be it more or less of the Things of this World. This Grace must run parallel with all Providences. Learn how to be full, and how to suffer want, and in every State to be content, Phil. 4. 12.

In this Duty all Men are concerned at all times, and in every State, not only the People of God, but even the Unregenerate also. I will therefore address some Considerations proper to both. And first to the Unregenerate, to stop their Mouths from repining, and charging God foolishly, when Providence crosses them. Let them seriously consider these four things.

(1.) That Hell and Eternal Damnation are the Portion of their Cup, according to the Tenor of Law and Gospel-Threatnings. Whatsoever therefore is short of this is to be admired as the Fruit of God's stupendious Patience, and Forbearance

ance towards them. Ah poor Souls ! Know you not, that you are Men and Women condemned to Wrath by the plain Sentence of the Law ? *Mark* 16. 16. *John* 3. 36. *2 Thess.* 1. 6, 7. And if so, sure there are other Matters to exercise your Thoughts, Desires, Fears and Cares about, than these. Alas ! if you cannot bear a Frown of Providence, a light Cross in these things, how will you bear the everlasting Burnings ! A Man that is to lose his Head to morrow, is not very solicitous what Bed he lies on, or how his Table is furnish'd the Night before.

(2.) Consider, tho' you be condemned Persons, and have no Promise to entitle you to any Mercy ; yet there are very many Mercies in your Possession at this Day. Be your Condition as afflictive as it will, is Life nothing ? Especially considering whither you must sink, when that Thread is cut. Are the necessary Supports of Life nothing ? Doth not Providence minister to you these things, tho' you daily disoblige it, and provoke God to send you to your own Place ? But, above all, is the *Gospel* and precious Means of Salvation nothing, by which you yet are in a capacity of escaping the Damnation of Hell ? O what would the Damned say, if they were but put into your Condition once more ? What ! and yet fret against God, because every thing else suits not your Desires ?

(3.) Consider, that if ever you be rescued out of that miserable Condition you are in, such cross Providences as these you complain of, are the most probable Means to do it. Alas ! Prosperity and Success is not the way to save, but destroy you, *Prov.* 1. 32. You must be bound in Fetters, and holden in Cords of Affliction, if ever your
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Divine Conduct: Or,

Ear be opened to Instruction, *Job* 36. 8, 9, 10. Wo to you, if you go on smoothly in the way in which you are, and meet with no Crosses.

(4.) *Lastly*, Consider, all your Troubles under which you complain, are pulled down upon your Heads by your own Sins. You turn God's Mercies into Sin, and then fret against God, because he turns your Sins into Sorrow. Your Ways and Doings procure these things to you. Lay your Hand therefore upon your Mouth, and say, *Why doth the living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sin*, Lam. 3. 39. But I must turn to the Lord's People, who have the least Pretences of all Men to be dissatisfied with any of God's Providences, and yet are but too frequently found in that Temper. And to them I shall offer the following Considerations.

(1.) *Consider your spiritual Mercies and Privileges with which the Lord Jesus hath invested you, and repine at your Lot of Providence, if you can.* One of these Mercies alone, hath enough in it to sweeten all your Troubles in this World. When the Apostle consider'd them, his Heart was overwhelmed with Astonishment; so that he could not forbear in the midst of all his outward Troubles to cry out, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath abounded to us in all spiritual Blessings, &c.* Eph. 1. 3. Oh, who that sees such an Inheritance settled upon him in Christ, can ever open his Mouth more to repine at his Lot of Providence!

(2.) *Consider your Sins, and that will make you contented with your Lot.* Yea, consider two things in Sin. (1.) What it deserves from God, and (2.) What it requires to mortify and purge it in you. It deserves from God Eternal Ruin: The
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Merit of Hell is in the least vain Thought: Every Sin forfeits all the Mercies you have ; and if so, rather wonder your Mercies are so many, than that you have no more. Besides, you cannot doubt, but your Corruptions require all the Crosses, Wants and Troubles that are upon you, and it may be, a great deal more, to mortify and subdue them. Don't you find, after all the Rods that have been upon you, a proud Heart still, a vain and earthly Heart still ? O how many bitter Potions are but necessary to purge out this tough malignant Humour !

(3.) *Consider how near you are to the Change of your Condition:* Have but a little Patience, and all will be as well with you as your Hearts can desire. It is no small Comfort to the Saints, that this World is the worst Place that ever they shall be in: Things will better every day with them. If the Traveller have spent all his Money, yet it doth not much trouble him, if he know himself within a few Miles of his own Home. If there be no Candles in the House, we do not much matter it, if we are sure it's almost Break of Day ; for then there will be no use for them. This is your Case : *Your Salvation is nearer than when you believed,* Rom. 13. 11.

I have done with the directive Part of this Discourse ; but before I pass to this fifth Head, I judge it necessary to leave a few Cautions to prevent the Abuse of Providence, and your Miscarriages in your Behaviour towards it. And,

First Caution.

If Providence delay the Performance of any Mercy to you, that you have long waited and prayed for ; yet see that you despond not, nor grow weary of waiting upon God for that Reason. It pleases the Lord
often.

oftentimes to try, and exercise his People this way, and make them cry, *How long, Lord, how long?* Psalm 12. 1, 2.

These Delays, both upon Spiritual and Temporal accounts, are frequent, and when they befall us, we are too apt to interpret them as Denials, and fall into a sinful Despondency of Mind, tho' there be no cause at all for it, *Psalm 31. 12. Lam. 3. 8, 44.* It is not always that the Returns of Prayer are dispatcht to us in the same Hour they are asked of God; yet sometimes it falls out so, *Isa. 65. 24. Dan. 9. 23.* But tho' the Lord means to perform to us the Mercies we desire; yet he will ordinarily exercise our Patience to wait for them; and that for these Reasons.

(1.) Because *our* Time is not the *proper* Season for us to receive our Mercies in. Now the *Season* of Mercy is a very great Circumstance that adds much to the value of it. God judges not as we do; we are all in haste, and will have it now, *Numb. 22. 13. But he is a God of Judgment, and blessed are they that wait for him, Isa. 30. 18.*

(2.) Afflictive Providences have not accomplished that Design upon our Hearts they were sent for, when we are so earnest and impatient for a Change of them; and till then the Rod must not be taken off, *Isa. 10. 12.*

(3.) The more Prayers and Searchings of Heart come between our Wants and Supplies, our Afflictions and Reliefs, the sweeter are our Reliefs and Supplies thereby made to us, *Isa. 25. 9. This is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: This is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will rejoice and be glad in his Salvation.* This recompenses the Delay, and pays us for all the Expenses of our Patience.

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But tho' there be such weighty Reasons for the stop and delay of refreshing comfortable Providences ; yet we cannot bear it, our Hands hang down, and we faint, *Psal. 69. 3. I am weary of my crying, my Throat is dry, mine Eyes fail while I wait for my God.* For alas ! we judge by Sense and Appearance, and consider not, that God's *Heart* may be *towards* us, whilst the *Hand* of his Providence seems to be *against* us. If things continue at one rate with us, we think our Prayers are lost, and our Hopes perished from the Lord : much more when Things grow worse and worse, and our Darkness and Trouble encreases, as usually it doth just before the break of Day and change of our Condition, then we conclude, God is angry with our Prayers. See *Gideon's Reply, Judges 6. 13.* This even staggered a *Moses's Faith, Exod. 5. 22, 23.* O what groundless Jealousies and Suspicions of God are found at such times in the Hearts of his own Children ! *Job 9. 16, 17. Psal. 77. 7, 8, 9.*

But this is our great Evil, and to prevent it in future Trials, I will offer a few proper Considerations in the Case.

1. The delay of your Mercies is really for your advantage. You read *Isa. 30. 18. The Lord waits that he may be gracious.* What is that ? Why, it's nothing else but the Time of his Preparation of Mercies for you, and your Hearts for Mercy, that so you may have it with the greatest Advantage of Comfort. The foolish Child would pluck the Apple while it's green ; but when it's ripe, it drops of its own accord, and is more pleasant and wholesome.

2. It's a greater Mercy to have an Heart willing to refer all to God, and be at his dispose, than
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to enjoy presently the Mercy we are most eager and impatient for. In that God pleases *you*, in this you please *God*. A Mercy may be given you as the Fruit of common Providence ; but such a Temper of Heart is the Fruit of special Grace. So much as the glorifying of God is better than the Content and Pleasure of the Creature, so much is such a Frame better than such a Fruition.

3. Expected Mercies are never nearer, than when the Hearts and Hopes of God's People are lowest. Thus in their Deliverance out of *Egypt* and *Babylon*, Ezek. 37. 11. So we have found it in our own personal Concerns: *At Evening Time it shall be Light*, Zach. 14. 7. When we look for increasing Darkness, Light arises.

4. Our unfitness for Mercy is the reason why they are delayed so long. We put the Blocks into the way of Mercy, and then repine, that they make no more haste to us, *Isa. 59. 1, 2. The Lord's Hand is not shortned, but our Iniquities have separated betwixt him and us.*

5. Consider, the Mercies you wait for are the Fruits of pure Grace, you deserve them not, nor can claim them upon any Title of desert ; and therefore have reason to wait for them in a patient and thankful Frame.

6. Consider, how many Millions of Men as good as you by Nature, are cut off from all Hope and Expectation of Mercy for ever, and there remains to them nothing but a *fearful Expectation of Wrath*. This might have been your Case ; and therefore be not of an impatient Spirit under the Expectations of Mercy.

Second Caution.

Pry not too curiously into the Secrets of Providence, nor suffer your shallow Reason arrogantly to judge and censure its Designs.

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There be hard Texts in the *Works*, as well as in the *Word* of God. It becomes us modestly and humbly to *Reverence*, but not to *Dogmatize* too boldly and positively upon them: A Man may easily get a Strain by over-reaching. *When I thought to know this* (saith *Asaph*) *it was too wonderful for me.* I thought to know this, there was the arrogant Attempt of Reason, there he pryed into the *Arcana* of Providence; but it was too wonderful for me, it was *labor inutilis*, as *Calvin* expounds it. He pryed so far into that puzzling Mystery of the *Afflictions* of the *Righteous*, and *Prosperity* of the *Wicked*, till it begat *Envy* towards them, and *Despondency* in himself, Psalm 73. 3, 13. And this was all he got by summoning Providence to the Bar of Reason. Holy *Job* was guilty of this Evil, and ingenuously ashamed of it, *Job* 42. 3.

I know there is nothing in the Word, or in the Works of God, that is repugnant to sound Reason: But there are some things in both, which are opposite to carnal Reason, as well as above right Reason; and therefore our Reason never shews it self more unreasonable, than in summoning those things to its Bar, which transcend its Sphere and Capacity. Manifold are the Mischiefs which ensue upon this Practice.

1. By this we are drawn into an unworthy Suspicion and Distrust of the Faithfulness of God in the Promises. *Sarah* laught at the Tydings of the Son of Promise, because Reason contradicted, and told her it was naturally impossible, *Gen.* 18. 13, 14.

2. Hence comes Despondency of Mind, and Faintness of Heart under afflictive Providences; Reason can discern no good Fruits in them, nor

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p. 112.

Deliverance from them, and so our Hands hang down in a sinful discouragement, saying, all these things are against us, 1 Sam. 27. 1.

3. Hence flow Temptations to deliver our selves by indirect and sinful *Mediums*, Isa. 30. 15, 16. When our own Reason fills us with a distrust of Providence, it naturally prompts us to sinful shifts, and there leaves us entangled in the Snares of our own making.

Beware therefore you lean not too much to your own Reasons and Understandings. Nothing is more plausible, nothing more dangerous. In other Matters it is appointed the Arbitrator and Judge, we make it so here, and therefore we are so diffident and distrustful, notwithstanding the fullest Security of the Promises, whilst our Reason stands by unsatisfied.

The Fifth Head.

Having given Direction for the due Management of this great and important Duty, what remains, but that we now set our Hearts to it, and make it the constant Work of every Day throughout our Lives? O what Peace, what Pleasure, what Stability, what holy Courage and Confidence would result from such an Observation of Providence as hath been directed to! But alas! we may say with reference to the Voices of Divine Providence, as it is Job 33. 14. *God speaketh once, yea twice, yet Man perceiveth it not.* Many a time Providence hath spoken Instruction in Duty, Conviction for Iniquity, Encouragement under Despondency; but we regard it not. How greatly are we all wanting to our Duty and Comfort by this neglect! It will be but needful therefore to spread before you the Loveliness and Excellency of walking with God in a due and daily

The Mystery of Providence.

151

daily Observation of his Providences, that our Souls may be fully engaged to it.

First Motive.

And first, let me offer this as a moving Argument to all gracious Souls; *That by this means you may maintain sweet and sensible Communion with God from day to day.* And what is there desirable in this World, in comparison therewith! *Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy Works: I will triumph in the Works of thy Hands, Psal. 92. 4.* Your Hearts may be as sweetly and sensibly refreshed by the Works of God's Hands, as by the Words of his Mouth. *Psal. 104. per totum*, is spent in the consideration of the Works of Providence, which so filled the Psalmist's Heart, that, by way of Ejaculation, he expresses the Effect of it, *Ver. 34. My Meditation of him shall be sweet.*

Communion with God, properly and strictly taken, consists in two things; viz. God's Manifestation of himself to the Soul, and the Soul's answerable Returns to God. This is that *intimate Fellowship* we have here with God. Now God manifests himself to his People by Providences as well as Ordinances; neither is there any Grace in a sanctified Soul hid from the gracious Influences of his *Providential Manifestations*. Sometimes the Lord manifests his Displeasure and Anger against the Sins of his People in correcting and rebuking Providences. His Rods have a chiding Voice, *Micah 6. 9. Hear the Rod, and who hath appointed it.* This discovery of God's Anger kindly melts and thaws a gracious Soul, and produces a double sweet Effect upon it, namely, *Repentance* for Sins past, and due Caution against future Sins. (1.) It thaws and melts the Heart for Sins committed. Thus David's Heart was melted for his

Sin, when the Hand of God was heavy upon him in Affliction, *Psal.* 32. 4, 5. Thus the *Captive Church*, upon whom fell the saddest and most dismal Providence that ever befel any of God's People in any Age of the World; see how their Hearts are broken for Sin under this severe Rebuke, *Lam.* 2. 17, 18, 19. And then, (2.) For Caution against Sin for the time to come; it's plain, that the Rebukes of Providence leave that Effect also upon gracious Hearts, *Ezra* 9. 13, 14. *Psalms* 85. 8.

Sometimes he cheers and comforts the Hearts of his People with smiling and reviving Providences, both Publick and Personal. There are Times of lifting up as well as casting down by the Hand of Providence. The Scene changes, the Aspects of Providence are very cheerful and encouraging; their Winter seems to be over; they put off their Garments of Mourning; and then, Ah, what sweet Returns are made to Heaven by gracious Souls! Doth God lift them up by Prosperity? They also will lift up their God by Praises. See *Psal.* 18. Title, and v. 1, 2, 3. So *Moses* and the People with him, *Exod.* 15. when God had delivered them from *Pharaoh*, how do they exalt him in a Song of Thanksgiving, which for the Elegancy and Spirituality of it, is made an Emblem of the Doxologies given to God in Glory by the Saints, *Rev.* 15. 3.

Upon the whole, whatever Effects our Communion with God in any of his Ordinances doth use to produce upon our Hearts, the same we may observe to follow our conversing with him in his Providences. For,

1. It is usually found in the Experience of all the Saints, that in what Ordinance or Duty soever they have any sensible Communion with God,

it naturally produces in their Spirits a deep Abasement and Humiliation from the Sense of Divine Condescensions to such vile poor Worms as we are. Thus *Abraham*, Gen. 18. 27. *I am but Dust and Ashes.* The same effect follows our Converse with God in his Providences. Thus when God had in the way of his Providence prospered *Jacob*, how doth he lay himself at the Feet of God, as a Man overwhelmed with the Sense of Mercy! See Gen. 32. 5, 10. *And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy Mercies, and of all the Truth which thou hast shewed thy Servant; for with my Staff I passed over this Jordan, and now am become two Bands.* Thus also it was with *David*, 2 Sam. 7. 18. *Who am I, and what is my Father's House, that thou hast brought me hitherto?* And I doubt not but some of you have found the like Frame of Heart upon you, that these Holy Men here expressed. Can you not remember when God lifted you up by Providence, how you cast down your selves before him, and have been viler in your own Eyes than ever? Why, thus do all gracious Hearts: What am I, that the Lord should do thus and thus for me! O that ever so Great and Holy a God should thus be concerned for so vile and sinful a Worm!

(2.) Doth Communion with God in Ordinances melt the Heart into Love to God? *Cant.* 2. 3, 4, 5. Why, so doth the Observation of his Providence also. Never did any Man converse with God's Works of Providence aright, but found his Heart at some times melted into Love to the God of his Mercies, *Psalms* 18. 1. compared with the Title. When God had delivered him from the Hand of *Saul*, and all his Enemies, he said, *I will love thee, O Lord, my Strength.* Every Man loves the

Mercies of God; but a Saint loves the God of his Mercies. The Mercies of God, as they are the Fewel of a wicked Man's Lusts, so they are Fewel to maintain a good Man's Love to God; not that their Love to God is grounded upon these external Benefits. Not thine, but thee, O Lord, is the Motto of a gracious Soul; but yet these things serve to blow up the Flame of Love to God in their Hearts, and they find it so.

3. Doth Communion with God set the keenest Edge upon the Soul against Sin? You see it doth, and have a pregnant Instance of it in *Moses*, when he had been with God in the Mount for forty Days, and had there enjoyed Communion with him; when he came down and saw the Calf the People had made, see what an holy Paroxysm of Zeal and Anger it cast his Soul into, *Exod.* 32. 19, 20. Why, the same Effect you may discern to follow the Saints Converse with God in his Providences. What was that which pierced the Heart of *David* with such a deep Sense of the Evil of his Sin, which is so abundantly manifested in *Psalms* 51. throughout? Why, if you look into the Title, you shall find it was the Effect of what *Nathan* had laid before him: And if you consult *2 Sam.* 12. 7, 8, 9, 10. you shall find, it was the Goodness of God manifested to him in the several endearing Providences of his Life, which in this he had so evilly requited the Lord for, that broke his Heart to pieces in the Sense of it: And I doubt not but some of us have sometimes found the like Effects, by comparing God's Ways and our own together.

4. Doth Communion with the Lord enlarge the Heart for Obedience and Service? Surely it is as Oil to the Wheels, that makes them run on freely and

and nimbly their Course. Thus when *Isaiab* had obtained a special *Manifestation* of God, and the Lord ask'd, *Whom shall I send?* He presents a ready Soul for the Employment, *Isa. 6. 8. Here am I, Lord, send me.* Why, the very same Effect follows sanctified Providences, as you may see in *Jehosaphat*, 2 *Chron. 17. 5, 6.* And in *David*, *Psalms 116. 12.* O when a Soul considers what God hath done for him, he cannot chuse but say, what shall I return? How shall I answer these Engagements?

And thus you see, what sweet Communion a Soul may have with God in the way of his Providences. O that you would thus walk with him! How much of Heaven might be found on Earth this way! And certainly, it will never repent the Lord he hath done you good, when his Mercies produce such Effects upon your Hearts: He will say of every Favour thus improved, it was well bestowed, and will rejoyce over you to do you good for ever.

Second Motive.

A great Part of the Pleasure and Delight of the Christian Life is made out of the Observations of Providence. It is said, *Psalms 111. 2. The Works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have Pleasure therein:* (i. e.) the Study of Providence is so sweet and pleasant, that it invites and allures the Soul to search and dive into it. How pleasant is it to a well tempered Soul to behold and observe,

(1.) The sweet Harmony and Consent of Divine Attributes in the Issues of Providence! They may seem sometimes to jarr and clash, to part with each other, and go contrary ways: But they only seem so to do; for in the winding up,

they always meet and embrace each other, *Psal.* 85. 10. *Mercy and Truth have met together: Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other.* It is spoken with an immediate Reference to that signal Providence of *Israel's* Deliverance out of the *Babylonish* Captivity, and the sweet Effects thereof: Wherein the Truth and Righteousness of God in the Promises, did as it were kiss and embrace the Mercy and Peace that was contained in the Performance of them, after they had seemed for seventy Years to be at a great distance from each other. For it is an Allusion to the usual Demonstrations of Joy and Gladness, that two dear Friends are wont to give and receive, after a long Absence and Separation from each other: They no sooner meet, but they smile, embrace and kiss each other. Even thus it is here. The Word *Weld* may be, (and by some is) rendered, *have met us*, and that also is true; for whenever these blessed Promises and Performances meet and kiss each other, they are also joyfully embraced and kissed by believing Souls. There is, I doubt not, a mediate Reference of this Scripture to the *Messiah* also, and our Redemption by him: In him it is that these Divine Attributes which before seemed to clash and contradict one another in the Business of our Salvation, have a sweet Agreement and Accomplishment. Truth and Righteousness do in him meet with Mercy and Peace in a blessed Agreement. What a lovely Sight is this! and how pleasant to behold! O if with *Habakkuk*, chap. 2. v. 3. we would but stand upon our Watch-Tower to take due Observations of Providence, what rare Prospects might we have! *Luther* understands it of the Word of God, q. 2, I will look into the Word and observe

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serve there how God accomplisheth all things, and brings them to pass, and how his Works are the fulfilling of his Word. Others (as *Calvin*) understand it of Man's own retiring Thoughts and Meditations, wherein a Man carefully observes what Purposes and Designs God hath upon the World in general, or upon himself in particular, and how the Truth and Righteousness of God in the Word, work themselves through all Difficulties and Impediments, and meet in the Mercy, Peace and Happiness of the Saints at last. Every Believer (take it in which Sense you will) hath his *Watch-Tower* as well as *Habakkuk*: and give me leave to say, it's an *Angelical Employment* to stand upon it, and behold the Consent of God's Attributes, the Accomplishment of his Ends, and our own Happiness in the Work of Providence. For this is the very Joy of the Angels and Saints in Heaven, to see God's Ends wrought out, and his Attributes glorified in the Mercy and Peace of the Church, *Rev.* 14. 1, 2, 3. & 8.

(2.) And as it's a pleasant Sight to see the Harmony of God's Attributes, so it is exceeding pleasant to behold the Resurrection of our own Prayers and Hopes as from the Dead. Why, this you may often see, if you will duly observe the Works of Providence towards you. We hope and pray for such and such Mercies to the Church, or to our selves; but God delays the Accomplishment of our Hopes, suspends the Answer of our Prayers, and seems to speak to us, as *Hab.* 2. 3. *For the Vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lye: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry:* but we have no Patience to wait the Time of the Promise, our Hopes languish and die
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in the Interim ; and we say with the despondent Church, *Lam. 2. 18.* *Our Hope is perished from the Lord* ; but oh, how sweet and comfortable is it, to see these Prayers fulfilled, after we have given up all Expectation of them ! May we not say of them, as the Scripture speaks of the Restoration of the Jews, it is even *Life from the Dead*. This was *David's Case*, *Psal. 31. 22.* he gave up his Hopes and Prayers for lost, yet lived to see the comfortable and unexpected Returns of them. And this was the Case of *Job*, *chap. 6. 11.* he had given up all Expectation of better Days, and yet this Man lived to see a Resurrection of all his lost Comforts with an Advantage. Think how that Change and unexpected Turn of Providence affected his Soul : it is with our Hopes and Prayers as with our *Alms*, *Cast thy Bread on the Waters, for thou shalt find it after many Days*, *Eccles. 11. 1.* or as it was with *Jacob*, who had given over all Hopes of ever seeing his beloved *Joseph* again, but when a strange and unexpected Providence had restored that hopeless Mercy to him again, oh how ravishing and transporting was it ? *Gen. 46. 29, 30.*

(3.) What a transporting Pleasure is it, to behold great Blessings and Advantages to us wrought by Providence, out of those very things that seemed to threaten our Ruin or Misery ? and yet by due observing the Ways of Providence, you may to your singular Comfort find it so. Little did *Joseph* think his Transportation into *Egypt*, had been in order to his Advancement there ; yet he lived with Joy to see it, and with a thankful Heart to acknowledge it, *Gen. 45. 5.* Wait and observe, and you shall assuredly find that Promise, *Rom. 8. 28.* working out its way through all

all Providences. How many times have you been made to say as *David*, *Psal.* 119. 71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted.* O what a Difference have we seen betwixt our Afflictions at our first meeting with them, and our parting from them ! We have entertained them with Sighs and Tears, but parted from them with Joy, blessing God for them, as the happy Instruments of our good. Thus our Fears and Sorrows are turned into Praises and Songs of Thanksgiving.

(4.) What unspeakable Comfort is it for a poor Soul, that sees nothing but Sin and Vileness in it self, at the same time to see what an high Esteem and Value the great God hath for him ! This may be discerned by a due Attendance to Providence, for there a Man sees *Goodness and Mercy following* him through all his Days, as it is, *Psal.* 23. 6. Other Men prosecute Good, and it flies from them, they can never overtake it ; but Goodness and Mercy follow the People of God, and they cannot avoid or escape it : it gives them chase Day by Day ; and finds them out ; even when they sometimes put themselves by Sin out of the way of it. In all the Providences that befall them, Goodness and Mercy pursues them. O with what a melting Heart do they sometimes reflect upon these things ! *and will not the Goodness of God be discouraged from following me, notwithstanding all my vile Affronts and Abuses of it in former Mercies ? Lord, what am I, that Mercy should thus pursue me, when Vengeance and Wrath pursue others as good by Nature as I am ?* It certainly argues the great Esteem God hath of a Man, when he thus follows him with sanctified Providences (whether they be Comforts or Crosses) for his good. And so much is plain, from *Job* 7. 18. *Lord what*

what is Man, that thou shouldst visit him every Morning and try him every Moment? Certainly, God's People are his Treasure, and by this it appears that they are so, that he withdraws not his Eye from them, *Job 36. 7.* I say not, that God's Favour and Respect to a Man, may be concluded singly from his Providences; but sanctified Providences may very much clear it to us: and when it doth so, it cannot but be Matter of exceeding great Joy.

(5.) To conclude, what is there in all this World that can give a Soul such Joy and Comfort as to find himself by every thing set on and farthered in his Way to Heaven! And yet this may be discerned, by an heedful Attendance to the Effects and Issues of Providences.

How cross soever the Winds and Tides of Providence at any time seem to us, yet nothing is more certain than that they all conspire to hasten sanctified Souls to God, and fit them for Glory.

St. Paul knew, that both his Bonds and the Afflictions added to them should turn to, or (as the Word *ἐκτρέφει* imports) finally issue in his Salvation, *Phil. 1. 19.* Not that in themselves they serve to any such Purpose; but as they are overruled and determined to such an End, *through Prayer, and the Supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.* When Prayer the external, and the Spirit the internal Means, are joined with them; then Afflictions themselves become excellent Means to promote Salvation. And have we not with Joy observed, how those very things, that Sense and Reason tell us are opposite to our Happiness, have been the most blessed Instruments to promote it? How hath God blessed Crosses to mortifie Corruption, Wants to kill our Wantonness, Disappoint-

instruments to wean us from the *World*! O we little think, how comfortable those things will be in the Review, which are so burdensome to present sense!

The Third Motive.

In the next place, I beseech you consider, *that an effectual Means the due Observation of Providence will be to over-power and suppress the natural Atheism that is in your Hearts.*

There is a natural seed of Atheism in the best Hearts, and this is very much nourished, by passing a rash and false Judgment upon the Works of Providence. When we see wicked ones to prosper in the World, and godly Men crushed and destroyed in the Way of Righteousness and Integrity; it may tempt us to think, there is no Advantage by Religion, and all our Self-denial and Holiness, to be little better than lost Labour. Thus stood the Case with good *Asaph*, *Psal. 73. 12, 13. Behold, these are the ungodly that prosper in the World, they increase in Riches: And what doth the Flesh infer from thence? Why no less than the unprofitableness of the Ways of Holiness, Verily I have cleansed my Heart in vain, and washed my Hands in Innocency.* This irreligious Inference carnal Reason was ready to draw from the Dispensations of outward Prosperity to wicked Men; but now if we would heedfully observe, either the signal Re-tributions of Providence to many of them in *this World*, or to all of them in the *World to come*; O what a full Confirmation is this to our Faith? *Psal. 9. 16. The Lord is known by the Judgments that he executeth.* The fifty-eighth Psalm contains the Characters of the most prodigious Sinners, whose Wickedness is aggravated,

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By the Deliberation with which it's committed, *Ver. 2.*

By their Habit and Custom in it, *Ver. 3.*

By their Incurribleness and Persistence in it, *Ver. 4, 5.*

And the Providence of God is their invited To destroy their Power, *Ver. 6.* and that either By a gradual and insensible Consumption of them, *Ver. 7, 8.* or,

By a sudden and unexpected Stroke, *Ver. 9.*

And what shall the Effects of such Providence be to the Righteous? Why, it shall be matter of joy, *Ver. 10.* And great Confirmation to their Faith in God, *Ver. 11.* *Verily there is a God that judgeth in the Earth.*

And on the contrary, how convincingly clear are those Providences, that demonstrate the Being, Wisdom, Power, Love and Faithfulness of God, in the supporting, preserving and delivering of the righteous, in all their Dangers, Fears and Difficulties? In these things the Lord shew himself to his people, *Psal. 94. 1.* Yea, he shew himself to spiritual Eyes in the Providences, as clearly as the Sun manifests himself by his own Beams of Light, *Hab. 3. 3, 4.* *His Brightness was as the Light, and he had Horns coming out of his Hands, and there was the hiding of his Power.* It is spoken of the Lord's going forth for his People in their Deliverance from their Enemies: and then he had Horns or Rays and Beams of Power and Mercy coming out of his Hands; by his Hands are meant his providential Administrations and Dispensations, and the Horns that came out of them, are nothing else but the glorious Display of his Attributes in those Providences. How did God make himself known to his People

in that signal Deliverance of them out of Egypt? See *Exod. 6. 3.* Then he was known to them by his Name *Jehovah*, in giving Being by his Providences to the Mercies promised.

Thus when *Christ* shall give his People the last and greatest Deliverance from *Antichrist*, he shall shew himself to his People in a vesture dipt in Blood, and his Name shall be called, *The Word of God*, *Rev. 19. 13.* His Name was the Word of God before; but then he was the Word *revealing* and discovering the Promises and Truths of God; now *accomplishing* and fulfilling them. That his Name is near, his wonderful Works declare, *Psal. 75. 1.*

But more particularly, let us bring it home to our own Experience. It may be, we find our selves sometimes assaulted with Atheistical Thoughts: We are tempted to think God hath left all things below to the Course and Sway of Nature, that our Prayers reach him not, as it is, *Lam. 3. 44.* that he regards not what Evils befall us. But tell me, Saints, have you not enough at hand to stop the Mouths of all such Temptations? O do but reflect upon your own Experiences, and solemnly ask your own Hearts,

(1.) Have you never seen the All-sufficient God in the Provisions he hath made for you and yours, throughout all the Way that you have gone! Who was it that supplied to you whatever was needful in all your straits? Was it not the Lord? 'Tis he that hath given Bread to them that fear him, and hath been ever mindful of his Covenant, *Psal. III. 5.* O do but consider the Constancy, Seasonableness, and at some times the Extraordinariness of these Provisions, and how they have been given in upon Prayer, and shut your Eyes if

if you can, against the convincing Evidence of that great Truth, *Job 36. 7. He withdraweth not his Eye from the Righteous.*

(2.) Have you not plainly discerned the Care of God in your Preservations from so many and great Dangers as you have escaped and been carried through hitherto? How is it that you have over-lived so many mortal Dangers, Sickneses, Accidents, Designs of Enemies to ruin you? It is, I presume, beyond Question with you, that the very Finger of God hath been in these things, and that it is by his Care alone, you have been preserved. When God had so signally delivered *David* from a dangerous Disease, and the Plots of Enemies against him, *by this* (saith he) *I know thou favour'st me, because mine Enemy doth not triumph over me,* *Psal. 41. 11.* He gathered from those gracious Protections, the Care God had over him.

(3.) Have you not plainly discerned the Hand of God, in the Returns and Accomplishments of your Prayers? Nothing can be more evident than this, to Men of Observation, *Psal. 34. 4, 5, 6. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my Fears. They looked unto him and were lightened, and their Faces were not ashamed. This poor Man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his Troubles.* Parallel to this, runs the Experience of thousands and ten thousands of Christians this Day; they know they have the Petitions they asked of him. The Mercy carries the very Impress and Stamp of the Duty upon it. So that we can say, This is the Mercy, the very Mercy I have so often sought God about. O how satisfying and convincing are these things:

(4.) Have you not evidently discerned the Lord's

Lord's Hand, in the guiding and directing of your Paths, to your unforeseen Advantage? Things that you never projected for your selves, have been brought about beyond all your thoughts. Many such things are with God; and which of all the Saints hath not found that Word, *Jer. 10. 23. verified by clear and undeniable Experience? The Way of Man is not in himself.* I presume, if you will but look over the Mercies you possess this Day, you will find three to one, it may be ten to one, thus wrought by the Lord for you. And how satisfying beyond all Arguments in the World are these Experiences, That there is a God to whom his People are exceeding dear, *a God that performeth all things for them!*

(5.) Is it not fully convictive, that there is a God who takes Care of you, in as much as you have found in all the Temptations and Difficulties of your Lives his Promises still fulfilled, and faithfully performed in all those Conditions? I appeal to your selves, if you have not seen that Promise made good, *Psal. 91. 15. I will be with him in Trouble;* and that, *1 Cor. 10. 13. God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the Temptation also make a Way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* Have not these been as clearly made out by Providence before your Eyes, as the Sun at Noon day? What Room then is left for Atheistical Suggestions in your Breasts?

The Fourth Motive.

The recording and recognizing of the Performances of Providence, will be a singular Support to Faith in future Exigencies. This excellent Use of it lies full in the very Eye of the Text. There never befell David in all his Troubles, a greater Strait and

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Alfred.

Distress than this; and doubtless his Faith had stagger'd, had not the Considerations of former Providence come in to its Relief. From this *To- pick* Faith argues, and that very strongly and conclusively. So did *David's* Faith in many Exigences: When he was to encounter the *Champion* of the *Philistines*, it was from former Providence that he encouraged himself, 1 *Sam.* 17. 37. And the Apostle *Paul* improves his Experiences to the same Purpose, 2 *Cor.* 1. 9, 10. Indeed the whole Scripture is full of it: What Christians understands not the exceeding Usefulness of those Experiences he hath had to relieve and enliven? But I shall not satisfy my self with the common Assertion, than which nothing is more trite in the Lips of Professors: but will labour to shew you, wherein the great Usefulness of our recorded Experiences, for encouraging Faith labouring under Difficulties, consists. To this Purpose, I shall desire the Reader to ponder seriously these following Particulars.

1. How much Advantage those things have upon our Souls, which we have already felt and tasted, beyond those which were never relished by any former Experience? What is Experience but the bringing down of the Objects of Faith to the Dijudication and Test of spiritual Sense? Now when any thing hath been once tasted, felt and judged by former Experience, it is much more easily believed and received when it concurs again. It's much easier for Faith to travel in a Path that is well known to it, having formerly trod it, than to beat out a new one which it never trod, nor can see one Step before it. Hence it is, tho' there be a Difficulty in all the Acts of Faith, yet scarce in any like the first Adventure

Adventure it makes upon *Christ*, and the Reason lies here because in the *subsequent* Acts it hath all its former Experiences to aid and encourage it; but in the *first Adventure* it hath none at all of its own, it takes a Path which it never knew before.

To trust God without any Tryal or Experience, is a more noble Act of Faith; but to trust him after we have often tryed him, is known to be more easy. O'tis no small Advantage to a Soul in a new Plunge and Distress, to be able to say, This is not the first time I have been in these Deeps, and yet emerged out of them! Hence it was, that *Christ* rub'd up his Disciples Memories with what Providence had formerly wrought for them in a Day of Straits, *Matth.* 16. 8, 9, 10, 11. O ye of little Faith, why reason ye among your selves, because ye have brought no Bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember? *q. d.* Were ye never under any Strait for Bread before now? Is this the first Difficulty that ever your Faith combated with? No, no, you have felt Straits, and experienced the Power and Care of God in supplying them, before now? and therefore I cannot but call you Men of little Faith; for a very ordinary and small Measure of Faith, assisted with so much Experience as you have had, would enable you to trust God. There is as much Difference betwixt believing before and after Experience, as there is betwixt Swimming with Bladders, and our first Venture into the deep Waters without them.

What a singular Encouragement to Faith do former Experiences yield it, by answering all the Pleas and Objections of Unbelief drawn from the Object of Faith? Now there be two things that Unbelief stumbles at in God: One is his Power, the other his Willingness to help.

(1.) Unbelief objects the Impossibility of Relief in deep Distresses, *Psal. 78. 19. Can God furnish a Table in the Wilderness? Can he give Bread also? Can he provide Flesh for his People?* O vile and unworthy Thoughts of God! proceeding from our measuring the immense and boundless Power of God, by our own Line and Measure: because we see not which way Relief should come, we conclude, none is to be expected. But all these Reasonings of Unbelief are vanquish'd by a serious Reflection upon our own Experiences: God hath helped, therefore he can, *Isa. 59. 1. His Hand is not shortened:* (i. e.) he hath as much Power and Ability as formerly.

(2.) Unbelief objects against the Will of God, and questions, whether he will now be gracious, though he hath formerly been so. But after so many Experiences of his Readiness to help, what Room for doubting remains? Thus *Paul* reasoned from the Experience of what he had done, to what he could do, *2 Cor. 1. 10.* and so did *David*, *1 Sam. 17. 36.* Indeed if a Man had never experienced the Goodness of God to him, it were not so heinous a Sin to question his Willingness to do him good: but what place is left after such frequent Tryals?

2. It gives great Encouragement to Faith, as it answers the Objections of Unbelief drawn from the Subject. Now these Objections are of two sorts also.

(1.) Such as are drawn from our great Unworthiness. How (saith Unbelief) can so sinful and vile a Creature expect, that ever God should do this or that for me? 'Tis true, we find he did great things for *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, &c.* but these were Men of eminent Holiness,

ness, Men that obeyed God, and denied themselves for him, and lived more in a Day to his Glory than ever I did in all my Days.

Well, but what signifies all this to a Soul, that under all its sensible Vileness and Unworthiness hath tasted the Goodness of God as well as they? As unworthy as I am, God hath been good to me notwithstanding: His Mercy appear'd first to me, when I was worse than I am now, both in *condition and disposition*; and therefore I will still expect the Continuance of his Goodness to me, though I deserve it not. *If when we were Enemies we were reconciled to God by the Death of his Son, how much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his Life?* Rom. 5. 10.

(2.) Such as are drawn from the Extremity of our present Condition; if Troubles or Dangers grow to an Height, and we see nothing but Ruin and Misery in the Eye of Reason before us; now Unbelief becomes importune and troublesome to the Soul; now where are thy Prayers, thy Hopes, yea, where is now thy God?

But all this is easily put by and avoided, by consulting our Experiences in former Cases. This is not the first time I have been in these straits, nor the first time I have had the same Doubts and Despondencies, and yet God hath carried me through all, *Psal. 77. 7, 8, 9, &c.* This is it that suffers not a Christian to unravel all his Hopes in an Hour of Temptation. O how useful are these Things to the People of God!

The Fifth Motive.

The Recognition of former Providences will minister to your Souls continual Matter of Praise and Thanksgiving, which is the very Employment of the Angels in Heaven, and the sweetest part of our Lives on Earth.

Divine Conduct : Or,

See *Psal.* 61. 7, 8. If God will prepare Mercy and Truth for *David*, he will prepare Praises for his God, and that daily. So *Psal.* 71. 6. *By thee have I been bolden up from the Womb, thou art he that took me out of my Mother's Bowels ;* (there Mercies from the beginning are recognized.) *My Praise shall be continually of thee :* there the natural Result of those Recognitions is expressed.

There be five things belonging to the Praise of God, and all of them have relation to his Providences exercised about us.

(1.) A careful Observation of the Mercies we receive from him, *Isa.* 41. 17, 18, 19, 20. This is fundamental to all Praise : God cannot be glorified for the Mercies we never noted.

(2.) A faithful Remembrance of the Favours received, *Psal.* 103. 2. *Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his Benefits.* Hence the Lord brands the Ingratitude of his People, *Psal.* 106. 13. *They soon forgot his Works.*

(3.) A due Appreciation and Valuation of every Providence that doth us good, 1 *Sam.* 12. 24. That Providence that fed them in the Wilderness with Manna, was the most remarkable Providence to them ? but they not valuing it at its Worth, God had not that Praise for it which he expected, *Numb.* 11. 6.

(4.) The Excitation of all the Faculties and Powers of the Soul in the Acknowledgment of these Mercies to us. Thus *David*, *Psal.* 103. 1. *Bless the Lord, O my Soul ; and all that is within me bless his holy Name.* Soul-praise is the very Soul of Praise : this is the Fat and Marrow of that Thank-offering.

(5.) A suitable Retribution for the Mercies received. This *David* was careful about, *Psal.*

116. 1. And the Lord taxes good *Hezekiah* for the Neglect of it, 2 *Chron.* 32. 24, 25. This consists in a full and hearty Resignation of all to him: that we have received by Providence from him: and in our Willingness actually to part with all for him, when he shall remand it.

Thus you see, how all the Ingredients to Praise, have respect to Providences. But more particularly I will shew you, that as all the Ingredients of Praise have respect to Providences, so all the Motives and Arguments obliging and engaging Souls to Praise, are found therein also. To this end consider, how the Mercy and Goodness of God is exhibited by Providence, to excite our Thankfulness.

(1.) That the Goodness and Mercy of God is let out upon his People in his Providences about them: and this is the very Root of Praise. It is not so much the Possession that Providence gives us of such or such Comforts, as the Goodness and Kindness of God in the dispensing of them, that engages a gracious Soul to Praise, *Psal* 63. 3. *Because thy Loving-kindness is better than Life, my Lips shall praise thee.* To give, maintain and preserve our Life, are choice Acts of Providences: but to do all this in a way of Grace and Loving-kindness, this is far better than the Gifts themselves. Life is but the Shadow of Death without it: this is the Mercy that crowns all other Mercies, *Psal.* 103. 4. It's this a sanctified Soul desires God would manifest in every Providence about him, *Psal.* 17. 7. and what is our praising of God else, but our shewing forth that Loving-kindness, which he sheweth us in his Providences? *Psal.* 92. 1, 2:

(2.) As the Loving-kindness of God manifested in Providences, is a Motive to Praise; so

the free and undeserved Favours of God, dispensed by the Hand of Providence, oblige the Soul to Praise. This was the Consideration that melted David's Heart into a thankful praising Frame, even the Consideration of the free and undeserved Favours cast in upon him by Providence, 2 Sam. 7. 18. *What am I? O Lord God: and what is my Father's House, that thou hast brought me hitherto? (i. e.)* raised me by Providence from a mean Condition to all this Dignity: *From following the Ewes, to feed Jacob his People,* Psalm 78. 70, 71. O this is it that engages Thankfulness, Gen. 32. 10.

(3.) As the Freeness of Mercies dispensed by Providence, engageth Praise; so the Multitudes of Mercies heaped this way upon us, strongly oblige the Soul to Thankfulness. Thus David comes before the Lord encompassed with a Multitude of Mercies to praise him, *Psal. 5. 7.* We have our Loads of Mercies, and that every day, *Psal. 68. 19.* O what a rich Heap will the Mercies of one Day make, being laid together!

(4.) As the Multitudes of Mercies dispensed by Providence, oblige to Praise; so the *Tenderness* of God's Mercy manifested in his Providence, leaves the Soul under a strong Obligation to Thankfulness. We see what tender Resentments the Lord hath of all our Wants, Straits and Burdens, *Psal. 103. 13.* *Like as a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* He is full of Bowels, as that Word *πολύσπλαγχνος* in James 5. 11. signifies. Yea, there are not only Bowels of Compassion in our God, but the Tenderness of Bowels, like those of a Mother to her Sucking Child, *Isa. 49. 15.* He feels all our Pains, as if the Apple of his Eye were touched, *Zech. 2.*

8. and all this is discovered to his People in the way of his Providences with them, *Psal.* **III.** 1, 2, 3, 4. O who of all the Children of God hath not often found this in his Providences? And who can see it, and not be filled with Thankfulness: All these are so many Bands clapt by Providence upon the Soul, to oblige it to a Life of Praise. Hence it is, that the Prayers of the Saints are so full of Thanksgivings upon these Accounts: 'Tis sweet to recount them to the Lord in Prayer: To lie at his Feet in an holy Astonishment at his gracious Condescensions to poor Worms.

The Sixth Motive.

The due Observation of Providence will endear Jesus Christ every Day more and more to your Souls. Christ is the Channel of Grace and Mercy: through him are all the *decurfus & recursus gratiarum*, all the Streams of Mercy that flow from God to us, and all the Returns of Praise from us to God, *1 Cor.* 3. 21, 22. All things are ours upon no other Title, but our Being his.

Now there be six Things in Providence, that are exceedingly endearing of the *Lord Jesus Christ* to his People: And these are the most sweet and delicious Parts of all our Enjoyments.

1. The Purchase of all those Mercies which Providences convey to us, is by his own Blood: For not only Spiritual and Eternal Mercies, but even all our Temporal ones, are the Acquisition of his Blood. Look, as Sin forfeited all, so *Christ* restored all these Mercies again to us by his Death. Sin had so shut up the Womb of Mercy, that had not *Christ* made an Atonement by his Death, it could never have brought forth one Mercy to all Eternity for us. It is *with him* that God freely gives us all things, *Rom.* 8. 32. Heaven it self, and all things

Bona gratia & gloria, ac præ omnibus divinarum tutelæ opibus, ac providentiæ suæ scutum. Poli Synopsi in loc.

things needful to bring us thither, among which is principally included the Tutelage and Aid of Divine Providence: So that whatever good we receive from the Hand of Providence, we must put it upon the Score of Christ's Blood; and when we receive it, we may say, 'Tis the Price of Blood: 'Tis a Mercy rising up out of the Death of Christ: It cost him dear, though it come to me freely: It's *sweet* in the *Possession*, but costly in the *Acquisition*. Now this is a most endearing Consideration: Did *Christ* dye, that these Mercies might live? Did he pay his invaluable Blood to purchase these Comforts, that I possess? O what transcendent, matchless Love, was the Love of Christ! You have known Parents that have laid out all their Stock of Money to purchase Estates for their Children; but when did you hear of any that spent the whole Stock and Treasure of their Blood, to make a Purchase for them? If the Life of Christ had not been so afflictive and sad to him, ours could not have been so sweet and comfortable to us: 'Tis through his Poverty we are enriched, 2 Cor. 8. 9. These sweet Mercies that are born of Providence every Day, are the Fruits of *the Travel of his Soul*.

2. The Sanctification of all, is by our Union with Christ: 'Tis by Virtue of our Union with his Person, that we enjoy the sanctified Gifts and Blessings of Providence. All these are Mercies additional to that great Mercy *CHRIST*, Mat. 6. 33. They are given with him, as in Rom. 8. 32. This is the Tenure by which we hold them, 1 Cor. 3. 21, 22, 23. Look, what we lost in *Adam*, is restored again with Advantage in *Christ*: Immediately upon the Fall, that Curse, Gen. 2. 17. seized upon all the miserable Posterity of *Adam*, and upon all their

their Comforts, *outward* as well as *inward*; and this still lies heavy upon them: All that Providence doth for them that are Christless, is but to feed so many poor condemned Wretches, till the Sentence they are under be executed upon them: It is indeed bountiful and open-handed to many of them, and fills them with Earthly Comforts; but not one special-sanctified Mercy is to be found among all their Enjoyments: These Gifts of Providence do but deceive, defile and destroy them through their own Corruptions, and for want of Union with Christ, *Prov. 1. 32. The Prosperity of Fools shall destroy them.*

But when a Man is once in Christ, then all Providences are sanctified and sweet, *Tit. 1. 15: Unto the Pure all things are pure. A little that a Righteous Man hath is better than the Treasures of many Wicked, Psal. 37. 16.* Now Christ becomes an Head of *Influence*, as well as of *Dominion*; and in all things he consults the Good of his own Members, *Eph. 1. 22.*

3. The Dispensation of all our Comforts and Mercies, is by his Direction and Appointment. It's true, the Angels are imploy'd in the Kingdom of Providence, they move the Wheels, *i. e.* are instrumental in all the Revolutions in this lower World; but still they receive Directions and Orders from Christ, as you may see in that admirable Scheme of Providences, *Ezek. 1. 25, 26, &c.* Now what an endearing Meditation is this! Whatever Creature be instrumental for any good to you, it's your Lord Jesus Christ that gave the Orders and Commands to that Creature to do it; and without it they could have done nothing for you: It's your Head in Heaven that consults your Peace and Comfort on Earth! These be the
Fruits

Fruits of his Care for you. So in the Prevention and Restraints of Evil; 'tis he that bridles in the Wrath of Devils and Men, he holds the Reins in his own Hands, *Rev. 2: 10.* 'Twas the Care of Christ over his poor Sheep at *Damascus*, that stopt the raging Adversary, who was upon the Way, designing to destroy them, *Acts 9.*

4. The Continuation of all your Mercies and Comforts, outward as well as inward, is the Fruit of his Intercession in Heaven for you. For look, as the offering up of the Lamb of God a Sacrifice for Sin, opened the Door of Mercy at first: so his appearing before God as a Lamb that had been slain, still keeps that Door of Mercy open, *Rev. 5. 6. Heb. 9. 24.* By this his Intercession, our Peace and Comforts are prolonged to us, *Zech. 1. 12, 13.* Every Sin we commit would put an end to the Mercies we possess, were it not for that Caution which is put in for us by it, *1 John 2. 1, 2.* *If any Man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and he is the Propitiation for our Sins, &c.* This stops all Pleas, and procures new Pardons for new Sins. Hence it is *he saves to the uttermost*, to the last compleating Act, *Heb. 7. 25.* New Sins do not irritate our former Pardons, nor cut off our Privileges settled upon us in Christ.

5. The returns and answers of all your Prayers and Cries to Heaven for the removing of your Afflictions, or supply of your Wants, are all procured and obtained for you by Jesus Christ. He is the Master of your Requests, and were it not that God had respect to him, he would never regard your Cries to him, nor return any Answer of Peace to you, how great soever your Distresses should be, *Rev. 8. 3, 4.* 'Tis his Name that gives

gives our Prayers their acceptance, *John 15. 16.* Because the Father can deny him nothing, therefore your Prayers are not denied. Doth God condescend to hear you in the Day of Trouble? Doth he convince you by your own Experience, that your Prayers have *Power with God, and do prevail?* O see how much you owe to your dear Lord Jesus Christ, for this high and glorious Privilege!

6. The Covenant of Grace, in which all your comfortable Enjoyments are comprized, and by which they are secured, sanctified and sweetned to you, is made in Christ, and ratified by him betwixt God and you. Your Mercies are all comprized in this Covenant, even your daily Bread, *Psalms 111. 5.* as well as your Justification, and other spiritual Mercies.

'Tis your Covenant Interest, that secures to you whatever it comprizes, *Isa. 55. 3.* Hence they are called the sure Mercies of *David*.

Nay, this is it that sanctifies them, and gives them the nature of special and peculiar Mercies. One such Mercy is worth a thousand common Mercies: And being sanctified and special Mercies, they must needs be exceeding sweet beyond all other Mercies. On these accounts it was, that *David* so rejoiced in his Covenant Interest, tho' laden with many Afflictions, *2 Sam. 23. 5.*

But now all this hangs entirely upon Christ. The *New Testament* is in his Blood, *1 Cor. 11. 25.* And whatever Mercies you reap from that Covenant, you must thank the Lord Jesus Christ for them. Put all this together, and then think how such Considerations will endear Christ to your Souls!

The Seventh Motive.

The due Observations of Providence have a marvelous Efficacy to melt the Heart, and make it thaw, and relent ingeniously before the Lord.

How can a sanctified Heart do less than melt into Tears, whilst it either *considers* the Dealings of God from time to time with it ; or *compares* the Mercies received with the Sins committed ; or the different Administrations of Providence towards it self and others ?

Let a Man but set himself to think deliberately and closely of the ways of Providence towards him, let him but follow the Tract of Providence, as it hath led him all along the way that he hath gone, and if there be any Principle of gracious Tenderneſs in him, he shall meet with variety of Occasions to excite and draw it forth. Reader, go back with thy serious Thoughts, (1.) To the Beginning of the Ways of God with thee, the Mercies that brake out early in thy Youth, even the first-born Mercies from the Womb of Providence ; and thou wilt say, What need I go farther ? Here is enough, not only to move, but overwhelm my Heart. *May I not from this time cry unto thee, my Father, thou art the Guide of my Youth, Jer. 3. 4.* What a critical Time is the Time of Youth ? It's the moulding Age ; and (ordinarily) according to the course of those leading Providences, After-Providences do steer their Course. What Levity, Rashness, Ignorance, and strong Propensions to Sin and Ruin accompanied that Age ? How many being then left to the sway of their own Lusts, run themselves into those Sins and Miseries, which they never recover themselves from to their dying Day ? These, like the Errors of the first Concoction,

coction, are rarely rectified afterwards. Did the Lord guide thee by his Providence, when but a Child? Did he then preserve thee from those Follies and Miscarriages, which blast the very Blossom, and nip the Bud, so that no good Fruit is to be expected afterwards? Did he then cast thee into such Families, or among such Company and Acquaintance, as moulded and formed thy Spirit to a better Temper? Did he then direct thee into that way of Employment, wherein thou hast seen so large a train of happy Consequents ever since following thee? And wilt thou not from henceforth say, *My Father, my Father, thou art the Guide of my Youth?*

Or, (2.) Let us but bring our Thoughts close to the Providences of after-times, and consider how the several Changes and Removes of our Lives have been ordered for us: Things we never foresaw nor designed (but much better for us than what we did design) have been all along ordered for us. *The way of Man is not in himself. God's Thoughts have not been our Thoughts, nor his Ways our Ways.* Among the eminent Mercies of thy Life, Reader, how many of them have been meer *Surprizals* to thee? Thy own Projects have been thrust aside, to make way for better Things designed by Providence for thee.

Nay, (3.) Do but observe the *Springs* and *Autumns* of Providence, in what order they have *flourished* and *faded* with thee, and thou wilt find thy self over-powered with the Sense of Divine Wisdom and Goodness: When necessity required, such a Friend was stirred up to help thee, such a Place opened to receive thee, such a Relation raised up or continued to refresh thee: And no sooner doth Providence deprive thee of any of them,

them, but either thy need of them ceases, or some other way is opened to thee. O the depth of God's Wisdom and Goodness! O the matchless Tenderness of God to his People!

(4.) Compare the Dealings of Providence with you and others, yea, with others that sprang up with you in the same Generation, it may be, in the same Families, and from the same Parents, it may be in Families greater and more flourishing in the World than yours, and see the difference, upon many great accounts, it hath made betwixt you and them. I knew a *Christian*, who after many Years Separation, was visited by his own Brother, the very sight of whom wrought upon him much as the sight of *Benjamin* did upon *Joseph*, so that he could not refrain to fall upon his Neck, and weep for Joy; but after a few hours spent together, finding the Spirit of his Brother, not only estranged from all that's spiritual and serious, but also very vain and prophane, he hastened to his Chamber, shut the Door upon him, threw himself down at the Feet of God, and with flowing Eyes and a melting Heart, admired the distinguishing Grace of God, saying, Was not *Esau* *Jacob's* Brother? O Grace, Grace, astonishing Grace!

(5.) Compare the Carriage of Providence towards you, with your own Carriage towards the Lord; and it must needs melt your Hearts to find so much Mercy bestowed where so much Sin hath been committed. What Place did you ever live in, where you cannot remember great Provocations committed, and manifold Mercies, notwithstanding that, received? O with how many *notwithstanding's* and *nevertheless's*, hath the Lord done you good in every Place! What Relation hath not

not been abused by Sin ; and yet both raised up and continued by Providence for your Comfort ? In every Place God hath left the Marks of his Goodness, and you the Remembrances of your Sinfulness : Give your selves but leave to think of these things, and it's strange if your Hearts relent not at the remembrance of them.

(6.) Or lastly, Do but compare your Dangers with your Fears, and both with the strange Outlets and Doors of escape Providence hath opened, and it cannot do less than over-power you with a full Sense of Divine Care and Goodness.

There have been dark Clouds seen to rise over you, Judgment even at your door, sometimes threatening your Life, sometimes your Liberty, sometimes your Estates, and sometimes your dearest Relations, in whom it may be your Life was bound up. Remember in that Day, what Faintness of Spirit seized you, what Charges of Guilt stirring up Fears of the Issue within you : You turned to the Lord in that Distress, and hath he not made a way to escape, and delivered you from all your Fears ? *Psalm 34. 4.*

Oh is your Life such a continued Throng, such a distracted Hurry, that there's no room to be found with Christians to sit alone, and think on these things, and press these marvellous Discoveries of God in his Providences upon their own Hearts ? Surely, might these things but lie upon our Hearts, talk with our Thoughts by Day, and lodge with us at Night ; they would even force their Passage down to our very Reins.

The Eighth Motive.

Due Observation of Providence will both beget and secure inward Tranquility in your Minds amidst the

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Vicissitudes and Revolutions of things in this unstable vain World.

Psalm 4. 8. *I will both lay me down in Peace, and sleep, for the Lord only maketh me dwell in safety.* He resolves the sinful Fears of Events shall not rob him of his inward Quiet, nor torture his Thoughts with anxious Presages: He will commit all his Concerns into that faithful fatherly Hand that had hitherto wrought all things for him, and he means not to lose the Comfort of one Night's rest, nor bring the Evil of to Morrow upon the Day, but knowing in whose Hand he was, wisely enjoys the sweet Felicity of a resigned Will.

Now this Tranquility of our Minds is as much begotten and preserved by a due Consideration of Providence, as by any thing whatsoever. Hence it was, that our *Lord Jesus Christ*, when he would cure the Disciples anxious and distracting Sollicitudes about a Livelihood, bids them consider the Care Providence hath over the Birds of the Air, and the Lillies of the Field, how it feeds the one and clothes the other, without any anxious Care of theirs; and would have them well consider those Providences, and reason themselves into a calm and sweet Composure of Spirit from those Considerations, *Mat. 6. 27, 28, 29, 30, 31.*

Two things destroy the Peace and Tranquility of our Lives, our *bewailing past Disappointments*, or *fearing future ones*. But would we once learn Provision and Provision to be Divine Prerogatives, and take notice how often Providence baffles those that pretend to it, causing the Good they foresaw (according to their Conjectures) coming to their hand, yet to balk them and flee from them; and the Evil they thought themselves sufficiently secured from, to invade them. I say, would

would we consider how Providence daily baffles these Pretensions of Men, and asserts its own Dominion, it would greatly conduce to the Tranquility of our Lives.

This is a great Truth, that there is no Face of Adversity so formidable, but being viewed from this Station, would become amicable. Now there be several things in the Consideration of Providence, that naturally and kindly compose the Mind of a Christian to Peace, and bring it to a sweet Rest, whilst Events hang in a doubtful Suspense.

1. As First, The Supremacy of Providence, and its uncontrollable Power in working. This is often seen in the good that it brings us in a way that's above the Thoughts and Cares of our Minds, or Labour of our Hands. *I had not thought (said Jacob) to have seen thy Face; and lo, God hath shewed me thy Seed also,* Gen. 48.

11. There is a frequent Coincidency of Providences in a way of Surprizal, which from no Appearance, or the remotest Tendency of outward Causes could be foreseen, but rather falls visibly cross to the present Scheme and Posture of our Affairs. Nothing tends to convince us of the Vanity and Folly of our own Sollicitudes and Projections, more than this doth.

2. The profound Wisdom of Providence in all that it performeth for the People of God. The Wheels are full of Eyes, *Ezek. i. 18.* (i. e.) there is an intelligent and wise Spirit that sits upon, and governs the Affairs of this World.

This Wisdom shines out to us in the unexpected, yea, contrary Events of Things. How often have we been courting some beautiful Appearance

that invited our Senses, and with trembling shun'd the formidable Face of other things, when notwithstanding the Issues of Providence have convinced us, that our Danger lay in what we courted, and our Good in what we so studiously declined? This also is a sweet Principle of Peace and Quiet to the Christian's Mind, that he knows not, but his Good may be imported in what seem'd to threaten his Ruin. Many were the Distresses and Straits of *Israel* in the Wilderness, but all was to *humble them, that he might do them good in the latter End*, Deut. 8. 16. Sad and dismal was the Face of that Providence that sent them out of their own Land, into the Land of the *Chaldeans*; yet even this was a Project to do them good, Jer. 24. 5. How often have we retracted our rash and head-long Censures of Things upon Experience of this Truth! And been taught to bless our Afflictions and Disappointments in the Name of the Lord. Many a time have we kissed those Troubles at parting, which we met with trembling. And what can promote Peace under doubtful Providences more effectually than this?

3. The Experiences we have had throughout our Lives of the Faithfulness and Constancy of Providence, are of excellent Use to allay and quiet our Hearts in any Trouble that betals us. *Hitherto God hath helped*, 1 Sam. 7. 12. We never found him wanting to us in any Case hitherto: This is not the first Strait we have been in; the first time that our Hearts and Hopes have been low. Surely, he is the same God now as heretofore, his Hand is not shortned, neither doth his Faithfulness fail. O recount in how great Extremities former Experience hath taught you not to despair.

4. The

4. The Conjectures Christians may make of the Way of Providence towards them, for what its former Methods have been towards them, is exceeding quieting and comfortable. It's usual with Christians, to compare Times with Times, and to guess at the Issue of one Providence by another. The Saints do know what course Providence usually holds, and accordingly with great Probability collect what they may expect from what in like Cases they have formerly observed. Christian, examine thine own Heart, and its former Observations, and thou wilt find, as *Psal.* 89. 30, 31, 32. That it's usually the way of God to prepare some smart Rods to correct thee, when either thy Heart hath secretly revolted from God, and is grown vain, careless and sensual, or when thy Steps have declined, and thou hast turned aside to the Commission of Iniquity. And then when those Rods have been sanctified, to humble, reduce and purge thy Heart, it's usually observed, that those sad Providences are then upon the change, and then the Lord changes the Voice of his Providence towards thee, *Jer.* 3. 12, 13. *Go, and proclaim these Words towards the North, and say, Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine Anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep Anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine Iniquity, &c.*

If therefore I find the blessed Effects of the Rod upon me, that it hath done its Work, to break the hard Heart, and pull down the proud Heart, and awaken the drowsie Heart, and quicken the slothful, negligent, lazy Heart; now with great Probability I may conjecture, a more comfortable Aspect of Providence will quickly appear, the refreshing and reviving Time is nigh.

5. It is usual with Christians, to argue themselves into fresh reviving Hopes, when the State of things is most forlorn, by comparing the Providences of God one with another.

(1.) It is a mighty composing Meditation, when we compare the Providences of God towards the inanimate and irrational Creatures, with his Providences towards us. Doth he take care for the very Fowls of the Air, for whom no Man provides, as well as those at the Door which we daily feed? Doth he so clothe the very Grass of the Field? Hear the young Ravens, when they cry for Meat? And can it be supposed, he should forget his own People, that are of much more value than these?

(2.) Or if we compare the Bounty and Care that Providence hath expressed to the Enemies of God, how it feeds and clothes and protects them, even whilst they are fighting against him with his own Mercies; it cannot but quiet and satisfy us, that surely he will not be wanting to that People upon whom he hath set his Love, to whom he hath given his Son, and for whom he hath designed Heaven it self.

(3.) Or Lastly, It must needs quiet us, when we consider, what the Lord did for us in the way of his Providence, when we our selves were in the State of Nature, and Enmity against God. Did he not then look after us, when we knew him not? Provided for us, when we owned him not in any of his Mercies? Bestowed thousands of Mercies upon us, when we had no Title to Christ or any one Promise? And will he now do less for us, since we are reconciled and become his Children?

Surely,

Surely, such Considerations as these, cannot but fill the Soul with Peace, and preserve the Tranquility of it under the most distracting Providences.

The Ninth Motive.

Due Observations of the Ways of God in his Providences towards us, have an excellent Usefulness and Aptitude to advance and improve Holiness in our Hearts and Lives. For,

1. The Holiness of God is manifested to us in all his Works of Providence, *Psal. 145. 17. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his Works.* The Instruments used by Providence may be very sinful and wicked, they may aim at base Ends, and make use of wicked Mediums to attain them; but it's certain God's designs are most pure, and all his Workings are so too. Though he permits, limits, orders and over-rules many unholy Persons and Actions; yet in all he works like himself; and his Holiness is no more defiled and stained by their Impurity, than the Sun-beams are by the noisome Exhalations of a Dunghil, *Deut. 32. 4. He is the Rock, his Work is perfect; for all his Ways are Judgment, a God of Truth, and without Iniquity: Just and Right is he.* So that in all his Providences he sets before us a perfect Pattern of Holiness, that we might be holy in all our Ways, as our Father is in all his Ways. But this is not all.

2. His Providences, if duly observed, promote Holiness, by stopping up our Way to Sin. Oh if Men would but note the Designs of God in his preventive Providences, how useful would it be to keep them upright and holy in their Ways? For why is it, that the Lord so often hedges up our Way with Thorns, as it is, *Hosea 2. 6.* But that we should not find our Paths to Sin? Why doth

he clog us, but to prevent our straying from him? *2 Cor 12. 7. Lest I should be exalted above measure, there was given me a Thorn in the Flesh, a Messenger of Satan to buffet me.* O 'tis good to attend to these Works of God, and study the meaning of them. Sometimes Providence crosseth a hopeful thriving Project to advance our Estate, and frustrates all our Labours and Cares; why is this? but to hide Pride from Man. Shouldst thou prosper in the World, that Prosperity might be thy Snare, and make thee a proud, sensual, vain Soul; the Lord Jesus sees this, and therefore withdraws the Food and Fuel from thy Corruptions.

It may be thou hast a crazy, diseased, weak Body; thou labourest under often Infirmities: in this, the Wisdom and Care of God over thy Soul is manifested; for wert thou not so clogged, how probable is it, that much more Guilt might be contracted? Your Poverty doth but clog your Pride; Reproaches clog your Ambition: Want prevents Wantonness: Sickness of Body conduces to the Prevention of many inward gripes of Conscience and groans under Guilt.

3. The Providences of * God may be observed to conduce to our Holiness, not only preventing Sin, that we may not fall into it; but also purging our Sins when we are fallen into them, *Isa.*

27. 9. By this therefore shall the Iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the Fruit to take away his Sin.

So *Dan. 11. 33, 34, 35.* they are of the same use that Fire and Water are for purging and cleansing; not that they can purge us from Sin in their own Virtue and Power, for if so, those that have most Afflictions would have most Grace also? but it is in the Virtue of Christ's Blood, and God's Blessing upon afflictive Providence, that they purge

* God would not rub so hard, if it were not to fetch out the Dirt that is ingrain'd in our Natures: He loves Purity so well, he had rather see a Hole, than a Spot in his Child's Garment. Gurnal's Christian Armour, Par. 2. p. 221.

us from Sin. A Cross without a Christ never did any Man good. Now in God's afflictive Providences for Sin there are many things that tend to the purging of it. For,

(1.) Such Rebukes of Providence discover the Displeasure of God against us: the Lord frowns upon us in those Providences. Our Father is angry, and these are the Tokens of it; and nothing works more to the melting of a gracious Heart than this. Must not the Heart of a Child melt and break whilst the Father is angry. O this is more bitter to our Spirits than all the Smart and Anguish of the Affliction can be to our Flesh. See *Psalm 38. 1, 2, 3. O Lord rebuke me not in thy Wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot Displeasure: for thine Arrows stick fast in me; and thine Hand presseth me sore. There is no Soundness in my Flesh because of thine Anger: neither is there any rest in my Bones because of my Sin.*

(2.) By these Rebukes of Sin, the Evil of Sin is discovered more sensibly to us, and we are made to see more clearly the Evil of it in these Glasses of Affliction which Providence at such times sets before us, than formerly we ever saw. *Jer. 2. 19. Thine own Wickedness shall correct thee; and thy Backslidings shall reprove thee, know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my Fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of Hosts. O the Gall and Wormwood that we tast in it under God's Rebukes for it!*

(3.) Providence blasts and frustrates all sinful Projects to the People of God: whoever thrives in them, they shall not; *Isa. 30. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.* And this also convinces them of the Folly that is in Sin, and makes them cleave to the way of Simplicity and Integrity.

4. Holiness is promoted in the Soul by cautioning and warning the Soul against Sin for time to come; *Job 34. 31. I have born Chastisement, I will not offend any more.* O happy Providences, how smart soever, that make the Soul for ever afraid of Sin! surely such Rods are well bestow'd. This gives God his end: and if ever we sorrowed after a godly sort, in the Day of our Troubles, it will work this Carefulness, *2 Cor. 7. 11. Behold this self same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what Carefulness it wrought in you? &c.* O if ever a Man have been under a sanctified Rod which hath shewed him the Evil of Sin, and kindly humbled him for it; and a Temptation should again sollicite him to the same Evil: Why, thinks he, what a Madness is it for me to buy Repentance at so dear a Rate? Have I not smarted enough already? You may as well ask me, whether I will run again into the Fire, after I have been already scorch'd in it?

5. To conclude, *Providences* do greatly improve and promote Holiness, by drawing the Soul into the Presence of God, and giving it the Opportunity and Occasion of much Communion with him. Comfortable Providences will do this, they will melt a Man's Heart in love to the God of his Mercies, and so pain his Bowels that he shall not be quiet till he have found a Place to pour out his Soul in Thankfulness to the Lord, *2 Sam. 7. 18.*

Afflictive Providences will drive us to the Feet of God, and there make us to judge and condemn our selves. And all this hath an excellent Use to destroy Sin, and promote Holiness in the Soul.

The Tenth Motive.

Lastly, *The Consideration and Study of Providence will be of singular Use to us in a dying Hour.* Hereby we treasure up that which will singularly sweeten our Death to us, and greatly assist our Faith in the last Encounter. You find when *Jacob* died, what Reflections he had upon the Dealing of God with him in the various Providences of his Life: See *Gen.* 48. 3, 7, 15, 16. In like manner you find *Joshua* recording the Providences of God when at the Brink of the Grave: they were the Subject of his dying Discourse, *Josh.* 24. And I cannot but think it a sweet Close to the Life of any Christian: It must needs sweeten a Death-bed to recount there the several remarkable Passages of God's Care and Love to us from our Beginning to that Day; To reflect upon the Mercies that went along with us all the way, when we are come to the End of it. O Christians, treasure up these Instances for such a time as that is; that you may go out of the World blessing God for *all the Goodness of Truth* he hath performed to you all your Life long. Now the Meditations of these things must needs be of great Use in that Day, if you consider the following Particulars.

1. The time of Death is the time when Souls are usually most violently assaulted by Satan with horrid Temptations, and black Suggestions. We may say of that figurative as it's said of the natural Serpent, *nunquam nisi moriens, producit in longum.* He never exerts his utmost Rage till the last Encounter; and then his great Design is to persuade the Saints that God loves them not, hath no Care nor Regard for them, nor their Cries; though they pray for Ease, and cry for sparing Mercy, they see none comes. He handles them with

with as much Roughness and Severity as other Men; yea, many of the vilest and most desolate Wretches endure less Torments, and are more gently handled than they. *Psal. 73. 4. There are no Bands in their Death,* when as thou must go through a long Lane of Sickness to the Grave and endure many Deaths in one.

But what Credit can these plausible Tales of Satan obtain with a Christian who hath been treasuring up all his Life long the Memorials of God's tender Regard both to his Wants and Prayers, and that hath carefully remarked the evident Returns of his Prayers, and gracious Condescensions of God to him from his Beginning to that Moment? In this Case his Faith is mightily assisted by thousands of Experiences, which back and encourage it, and will not suffer the Soul to give up so easily a Truth which he hath so often sensibly felt and tasted. I am sure (saith he) God hath had a tender fatherly Care of me ever since I became his; he never failed me yet in any former Strait; and I cannot believe he will do so now. I know his Love is like himself, unchangeable. *John 13. 1. Having loved his own which were in the World he loved them unto the End: for this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our Guide even unto Death. Psal. 48. 14. Did he love me in my Youth, and will he cast me off in my decrepit Age? O God, (saith the Psalmist) thou hast taught me from my Youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous Works; now also, when I am old and gray headed, O God, forsake me not, Psal. 71. 17, 18.*

At Death the Saints are engaged in the last, and one of the most eminent Works of Faith, even the committing themselves into the hands of God, when

when we are launching forth into that vast Eternity, and entering into that new State, which will make so great a Change upon us in a Moment. In this Christ sets us a Pattern, *Luke 23. 46. Father, into thy Hand I commend my Spirit*; and having said thus, he gave up the Ghost. So Stephen at his Death, *Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit, and immediately fell asleep, Acts 7. 59.*

There be two signal and remarkable Acts of Faith, both exceedingly difficult, viz. its first Act and its last. The first is a great Venture that it makes of it self upon Christ; and the last is a great Venture too, to cast it self into the Ocean of Eternity, upon the Credit of a Promise. But yet I know the first Adventure of the Soul upon Christ is much more difficult than the last Adventure upon Death; and that which makes it so, is in great Measure the manifold recorded Experiences that the Soul hath been gathering up from the Day of its Espousals to Christ unto its Dying, which is (in a Sense) its Marriage Day. Oh with what Encouragement may a Soul throw himself into the Arms of that God with whom he hath so long conversed and walked in this World! Whose Visits have been sweet and frequent, with whom the Soul hath contracted so intimate Acquaintance in this World; whom he hath committed all its Affairs to formerly, and still found him a faithful God; and now hath no Reason to doubt, but it shall find him so in this last Distress and Exigence also.

3. At Death the People of God receive the last Mercies that ever they shall receive in this World by the Hand of Providence, and are immediately to make up their Accounts with God for all the Mercies that ever they received from his

his Hand. What can be more suitable, therefore to a dying Person, than to recount with himself the Mercies of his whole Life, the manifold Receipts of Favour for which he is to reckon with God speedily, and how shall this be done without a due and serious Observation and recording of them now? I know there are thousands of Mercies forgotten by the best of Christians: A Memory of Brass cannot contain them: And I know also, that Jesus Christ must make up the Account for us, or it will never pass with God; yet it is our Duty to keep the Accounts of our own Mercies, and how they have been improv'd by us, for we are Stewards, and then are to give an Account of our Stewardship.

4. At Death we owe an Account also to Men, and stand obliged (if there be Opportunity for it) to make known to them that survive us what we have seen and found of God in this World, that we may leave a Testimony for God with Men, and bring up a good Report upon his Ways. Thus dying *Jacob*, when *Joseph* was come to take his last Farewell of him in this World, strengthened himself, and sate upon the Bed, and related to him the eminent Appearances of God to him, and the places where, *Gen. 48. 2, 3.* as also an Account of his Afflictions, *Ver. 7.* So *Joshua*, in his last Speech to the People makes it his Business to vindicate and clear the Truth of the Promises, by recounting to them how the Providence of God had fulfill'd the same to a Tittle in his Day. *Josh. 23. 14.* *And behold (saith he) this Day I am going the Way of all the Earth, and ye know in all your Hearts, and in all your Souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you,*

you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.

And certainly 'tis of great Importance to the World, to understand the Judgments, and hear of the Experiences of dying Men. They of all Men are presumed to be most wise and most serious: Besides, this is the last Opportunity that ever we shall have in this World to speak for God. O then what a sweet thing would it be to close up our Lives with an honourable Account of the Ways of God! To go out of the World blessing him for all the Mercies and Truth which he hath here performed to us! how would this encourage weak Christians, and convince the Atheistical World, that verily there is a Reality and an Excellency in the Ways and People of God!

5. At Death we begin the *Angelical Life* of Praise and Thanksgiving. We then enter upon that everlasting sweet Employment; and as I doubt not but the Providences in which we were concerned in this World will be a Part of that Song which we shall sing in Heaven, so certainly it will become us to tune our Hearts and Tongues for it whilst we are here, and especially when we are ready to enter upon that blessed State. O therefore let it be your daily Meditation and Study what God hath been to you, and done for you, from the beginning of his Way hitherto.

And thus I have spread before you some Encouragements to this blessed Work. Oh that you would be perswaded to this lovely and every way beneficial Practice. This I dare presume to say, that whoever finds a careful and a thankful Heart to record and treasure up the daily Experiences of God's Mercy to him, shall never want new Mercies to record to his dying Day. It was said of *Claudian*, that he wanted Matter suitable
to

to the Excellency of his Parts ; but where is the Head or Heart that is suitable to this Matter ? who can utter the mighty Works of the Lord ? who can shew forth all his Praise ? *Psal. 106. 2.*

Thus I have, through the Aid of Providence dispatch'd the main Design I aimed at in the Choice of this Subject. All that remains will now be speedily finished in some few Corollaries to be briefly noted upon the whole, and three or four practical Cases to be stated. You have heard how Providence *performeth all things for you.* Learn thence,

First Corollary.

That God is therefore to be owned by you in all that befalls you in this World, whither it be in a Way of Success and Comfort, or of Trouble and Affliction. O 'tis your Duty to observe his Hand and Disposal: When God gives you Comforts, 'tis your great Evil not to observe his Hand in them. Hence was that Charge against *Israel*, *Hos. 2. 8.* *She did not know that I gave her Corn and Wine and Oil, and multiplied her Silver and Gold,* (i. e.) she did not actually and affectionately consider my Care over her and Goodness to her, in these Mercies. And so for Afflictions, 'tis a great Wickedness, when God's Hand is lifted up not to see it, *Isa. 26. 11.* *The Ox knows his Owner, and the Ass his Masters Crib,* *Isa. 1. 3.* The most dull and stupid Creatures know their Benefactors. O look to the Hand of God in all ; and know, that neither your Comforts nor Afflictions do arise out of the Dust, or spring up out of the Ground.

Second Corollary.

If God perform all things for you, how great is his Condescension to and Care over his People ! What a Man (saith *Job*, Chap. 7. Ver. 17, 18.) that thou shouldst

shouldst magnifie him, and set thine Heart upon him? and that thou shouldst visit him every Morning, and try him every Moment? Such is his tender Care over you that he withdraws not his Eye from you. See *Job 36. 7.* Lest any hurt you, he himself will guard and keep you Day and Night, *Isa. 27. 3.* Should he withdraw his Eye or Hand one Moment from you, that Moment would be your Ruin. Ten thousand Evils watch but for such an Opportunity, to rush in upon you, and destroy you and all your Comforts. You are too dear to him to be trusted in any hand but his own. *Deut. 32. 3.* *All his Saints are in thy Hand.*

Third Corollary.

Learn hence how you are obliged to perform all Duties and Services for God, who performeth all things for you. It was the wish of a good Man, *Optarem id me esse Deo, quod est mihi manus mea*, Oh that I could be to God what my Hand is to me, viz. a serviceable useful Instrument. Shall God do all things for you, and will you do nothing for God? Is Providence every Moment at work for you, and will you be idle? To what purpose then is all that God hath done for you? Is it not the Aim and Design of all to make you a fruitful People? If God plant and fence, and water you by Providence, sure he looks you should bring forth Fruit. *Isa. 5. 1, 2, 3, 4.* O that in return for all the Benefits of Providence, you would say to God as grateful *Elisha* said to the *Shunamite*, behold thou hast been careful for us with all this Care, what is to be done for thee? *2 Kings 4. 13.* and with *David*, *Psal. 116. 12.* *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his Benefits towards me?* He is ever doing you good; be you always abounding in his Work. His Providence stands by you in your greatest Distresses

ses and Dangers; don't you flinch from God, when his Service and your Duty is compass'd about with Difficulties. O be active for that God who is acting every Moment for you.

Fourth Corollary.

Doth God perform all things for his People? Do not distrust him then as often as new or great Difficulties arise. Why should you think he that hath done so many things for you, will now do no more? Surely the Lord's Hand is not shortned that it cannot save, nor his Ear heavy that it cannot hear; if any thing put a Stop to his Mercy, 'tis your Iniquities, your Distrust and Infidelity. Isa. 59. 1. How long will it be ere you believe him? If a thousand and ten thousand of Tryals and Experiences of his tender Care Faithfulness and Love will cure this Distemper in you, you have them at hand to do it. If the frequent Confutations of this your Distrust by the unexpected Breakings out of Mercy for you under like Discouragements will cure it, look back and you may see them. Certainly you have been often forced by Providence with Shame and Repentance to retract your rash Censures of his Care; and yet will you fall into the same Distemper again? Oh that you would once learn this great Truth, That no Man ever wanted that Mercy, which he wanted not an Heart to trust and wait quietly upon God for. You never yet sought God in vain, except when you sought him vainly.

The Fifth Corollary.

Confilia
& preces
non eo fi-
ne adhibe-
ri, ut dei,
per hæc
quasi im-
pedimen-

Doth God perform all things for you? then seek God for all by Prayer, and never undertake any Design without him: Certainly, if he do not perform it for you, you can never have what you desire and labour for: And though he have de-
signed

signed to perform this or that Mercy for you, yet for these things he will be enquired of that he may do it for you, *Ezek. 36. 37.* I reckon that Business as good as done, that Mercy as good as if it were in Hand, that trouble as good as over, for the doing, enjoying, or removing whereof we have engaged God by Prayer. 'Tis our Folly to engage this Instrument or that for us, to attempt this Way and that to compass our Design, and all the while forget him, upon whose Pleasure all Instruments and Means entirely depend. That which begins not with Prayer, seldom winds up with Comfort. *The Way of Man is not in himself*; if it were, Prayer might then be reckon'd lost Labour. O let him that performs all be owned and acknowledged in all.

The Sixth Corollary.

Lastly, If God perform all things for us, then it is our great Interest and Concernment in all things to study to please him, upon whom we depend for all things.

It is a grave and weighty Observation of Chrysostom. Nothing (saith he) should be grievous and bitter to a Christian, but to provoke the Displeasure of God. Avoid that, and no Affliction or Trouble whatever can cast down such a prudent Soul; but even as a Spark is easily extinguish'd in the Sea, so will the Favour of God extinguish those Troubles. It is with such a Soul (saith he) as it is with the Heavens; we think the Heavens suffer when they are over-spread with Clouds, and the Sun suffers when it is eclipsed; but there is no such thing, they suffer not when they seem to suffer. *Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia.* Every thing is well, and shall be well, when all is well betwixt us and God. The

ta, mutantur de-creta, & destinatus providentia cursus inhibeatur: Sed ut obsequium divinæ legi præstando, & consuetum providentia ordinem observando conscientia tranquillatur, & spe bonâ impleatur.

Wendelin. Theol. p.

186.
Chrosost. Hom. in 2 Cor. 7.

great Consolation of the Saints lies in this, that all that concerns them is in the Hands of their Father. *Pene desperassem nisi Christus esset caput Ecclesiae.* I had utterly despaired (saith Luther) had not Christ been Head of the Church. When he that performs all things is our God, even our God that delights in our Prosperity, that rejoices over us to do us good, what ample Security is there in the greatest Confusions and Dangers? When one told *Bouromeau* that there were some that laid wait for his Life, his Answer was, *An Deus est in mundo pro nihilo?* What, is God in the World for nothing? And as notable was the reply of *Silentiarius* in a like Case, *Si Deus mei curam non habet, quid vivo?* If God take no Care of me, how do I live, how have I subsisted hitherto? Though it seems a Romance to many (saith a late grave Author) yet we must either quit the Scripture, or give Credit to this, that the most infallible Rules for one to raise his Fortune and ensure a Destiny that can controul the Stars, are given forth there, (*viz.* in the Scriptures) where that evidently is found, *Sapiens dominabitur Astris, & quomodo unusquisque faber potest esse fortunæ suæ.* A good Man may even be his own Carver. O that we would but steer our Course according to those rare Politicks of the Bible, those divine Maxims of Wisdom. Fear nothing but Sin. Study nothing so much as how to please God. Warp not from your Integrity under any Temptation. Trust God in the Way of your Duty. These are sure Rules to secure your selves and your Interest in all the Vicissitudes of this Life.

My last Work will be to state three or four practical Cases about this Subject, and so I shall shut up this Discourse of Providence.

First Case.

How may a Christian discover the Will of God and his own Duty under dark and doubtful Providences?

In order to the clearing of this Case, we are to consider what is meant by the Will of God; what by those doubtful Providences, that make the discovery of his Will difficult, and what Rules are to be observed for the clearing up of God's Will to our selves under such difficult and puzzling Providences.

As to the Will of God, it falls under a twofold Consideration, of his *secret* and *revealed* Will. This Distinction is found in that Scripture, Deut. 29. 29. *The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us, &c.* The first is the Rule of his own Actions; the latter of ours: and this only is concerned in the Quere.

This Revealed Will of God is either manifested to us in his *Word* or in his *Works*. The former is his *commanding* Will, the latter his *effecting* or *permitting* Will; the one versant about Good, the other about Evil.

In these ways God manifests his Will to Men, but yet with great variety and difference, both as to the Things revealed, the Persons to whom he reveals them, and the degrees of Clearness in which they are revealed.

(1.) As to the Things revealed, there is great difference: for the great and necessary Duties of Religion are revealed to us in the Word, with the greatest Perspicuity and Evidence. About these there can be no Hesitation; but things of a lower nature and lesser concern are left more obscure.

(2.) As to the Persons to whom God reveals his Will, there is great difference; some are strong Men, others Babes, 1 Cor. 3. 1. Some have Senses exercised, others are of weak and dull Understanding; and we know every thing is received according to the ability and measure of the Person receiving it. Hence it is that one Man's Way is very plain before him, he knows what he ought to do; the other is ever and anon at a loss, bivious and uncertain what to do.

(3.) The manner of God's revealing his Will to Men is also very different. Some have had special, personal, and peculiar Discoveries of it made to them. So had *Samuel* about the choice of the Person whom he should anoint King, 1 Sam. 9. 15. And so had *David*, 1 Sam. 23. 2, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12. where you find upon his enquiry of God (likely by the *Urim* and *Ibummim*) God told him what was his Duty as to that Expedition, and what would be the Event of it.

But now all are tied up to the ordinary standing Rule of the written Word, and must not expect any such extraordinary Revelations from God. The way we now have to know the Will of God concerning us in difficult Cases, is to search and study the Scriptures, and where we find no particular Rule to guide us in this or that particular Case, there we are to apply general Rules, and govern our selves according to the Analogy and Proportion they bear towards each other.

But now it often falls out, that in such doubtful Cases we are entangled in our own Thoughts, and put to a loss what course to take. We pray with *David*, that God would make his Way plain before us, Psal. 5. 8. Afraid we are of displeasing God,

God, and yet doubtful we may do so, whether we resolve this way or that. And this comes to pass, not only through the difficulty of the case, but from our own Ignorance and Inadvertency; and very frequently from those Providences that lie before us, wherein God seems to hint his Mind to us, this way or that, and whether we may safely guide our selves by those Intimations of Providence, is doubtful to us.

That God doth give Men secret Hints and Intimations of his Will by his Providence, cannot be doubted; but yet Providences in themselves are no stable Rule of Duty, nor sufficient discovery of the Will of God. We may say of them, as it is, *Job 23. 8, 9. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there: and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left Hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: He hideth himself on the right Hand, that I cannot see him.*

If Providence in it self be allowed to be a sufficient discovery of God's Will to us, then we shall be forced often-times to justify and condemn the same Cause or Person, forasmuch as there is one Event happens to all, and as it falls out to the Good, so to the Wicked, *Eccles. 9. 2.* Beside, if Providence alone were the Rule to judge any Action or Design by; then a wicked undertaking would cease to be so, if it should succeed well; but Sin is Sin still, and Duty is Duty still, whatever the Events and Issues of either be.

3. The safest way therefore to make use of Providence in such Cases, is, to consider them as they follow the Commands or Promises of the Word, and not singly and separately in themselves. If you search the Scriptures with an indifferent and unbiassed Spirit, in a doubtful Case, pray for

Counsel and Direction from the Lord, attend to the Dictates of Conscience; and when you have done all, shall find the Providences of God falling out agreeably to the Dictates of your own Conscience, and the best Light you can find in the Word, you may in such cases make use of it as an Encouragement to you, in the way of your Duty: But the most signal Demonstrations of Providence are not to be accepted against a Scripture Rule; no Smiles or Successes of Providences may in this Case encourage us to proceed; and on the other side, no Frowns or Discouragements of Providence should dishearten us in the way of our Duty, how many soever we should encounter therein. Holy Job could not find the Meaning of God in his Works, yet would he not go back from the Commandments of his Lips, Job 23. 9. The like Resolution you find in David, to proceed in his Duty, and cleave to the Word, how many stumbling Blocks soever Providence should permit to be laid in his way. *I am become* (saith he) *like a Bottle in the Smoke* (not only blackt, but withered up by Troubles) yet do I not forget thy Statutes, Psalm 119. 13. And again, Ver. 87. *They had almost consumed me upon Earth: But I forsook not thy Precepts.*

Paul, by the Direction of the Spirit, was engaged to go to Jerusalem, Acts 20. 22. After a clear Revelation of the Mind of God to him in that Matter, how many difficult and discouraging Providences beset him in his way? The Disciples at Tyre said to him by the Spirit (tho' in that they followed their own Spirits) that he should not go to Jerusalem, Acts 21. 4.

Then at Cesarea he met Agabus a Prophet, who told him what should beset him when he came thither,

hither, Chap. 21. 10, 11. All this will not disswade him. And after all this, how passionately do the Brethren beseech him to decline that Journey? Ver. 12, 13. Yet knowing his Rule, and resolving to be faithful to it, he puts by all, and proceeds in his Journey.

Well then, Providence, in concurrence with the Word, may give some Encouragement to us in our Way; but no Testimony of Providence is to be accepted against the Word. If Scripture and Conscience tell you, such a way is sinful, you may not venture upon it, how many Opportunities or Encouragements soever Providence may suffer to offer themselves to you; for they are only permitted for your Trial, not your Encouragement: Take this therefore for a sure Rule, That no Providence can legitimate or justify any Moral Evil. Nor will it be a Plea before God for any Man to say, The Providence of God gave me Encouragement to do it, tho' the Word gave me none. If therefore in doubtful Cases you would discover God's Will, govern your selves in your search after it by these Rules.

1. Get the true Fear of God upon your Hearts, be really afraid of offending him, God will not hide his Mind from such a Soul, *Psal. 25. 14. The Secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his Covenant.*

2. Study the Word more, and the Concerns and Interests of the World less. The Word is a Light to your Feet, *Psal. 119. 105. i.e.* it hath a discovering and directive Usefulness as to all Duties to be done, and Dangers to be avoided: It is the great Oracle at which you are to enquire: Treasure up its Rules in your Hearts, and you will walk safely, *Psal. 119. 11. Thy Word have*

have I hid in my Heart, that I might not sin against thee.

3. Reduce what you know into Practice, and you shall know what is your Duty to practise, John 7. 17. *If any Man do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine.* Psalm 111. 10. *A good Understanding have all they that do thereafter.*

4. Pray for Illumination and Direction in the way that you should go; beg the Lord to guide you in Straits, and that he would not suffer you to fall into Sin. This was the holy Practice of Ezra, Chap. 8. 21. *Then I proclaimed a Fast there at the River Ahava, that we might afflict our selves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our Substance.*

Read the
obscure
Texts of
Provi-
dence,
with the
Comment
of the
Word, and
we cannot
make a
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terpreta-
tion of
them.

5. And this being done, follow Providence so far as it agrees with the Word, and no farther. There is no use to be made of Providence against the Word, but in subserviency to it. And there are two excellent Uses of Providence in subserviency to the Word. (1.) Providences, as they follow Promises and Prayer, are Evidences of God's Faithfulness in their Accomplishment. When David languished under a Disease, and his Enemies began to triumph in the hopes of his Downfal, he prays, Psalm 41. 10. *That God would be merciful to him, and raise him up; and by that, he saith, He knew the Lord favoured him, because his Enemy did not triumph over him, ver. 11.* This Providence he looked upon as a Token for Good, as elsewhere he calls it, Psal. 86. 17. And, (2.) Providences give us loud Calls to those Duties which the Command lays upon us, and tells us when we are actually and presently under the Obligation of the Commands, as to the Performance of them. Thus when sad Providences befall

beside the Church or our selves, they call us to Humiliation, and let us know, that then the Command upon us to humble our selves at the Feet of God, is in force upon us, *Micah 6. 9.* *The Lord's Voice cryeth to the City, and the Man of Wisdom shall see thy Name, bear the Rod, and who hath appointed it.* The Rod hath a Voice, and what doth it speak? Why now is the Time to humble your selves under the mighty Hand of God. This is the Day of Trouble, in which God hath bid you to call upon him: and *è contra*, when comfortable Providences refresh us, it now informs us, this is the time to rejoice in God, according to the Rule, *Eccles. 7. 14.* *In the Day of Prosperity be joyful.* These Precepts bind *always*, but not *to always*. It's our Duty therefore and our Wisdom to distinguish Seasons, and know the proper Duties of every Season: And Providence is an *Index* that points them out to us. Thus of the first Case.

Præcepta affirmati-
va obli-
gant sem-
per, non
ad semper

The Second Case.

How may a Christian be supported in waiting upon God, whilst Providence delays the Performance of the Mercies to him for which he hath long pray'd and waited?

Two Things are supposed in this Case.

1. That Providence may linger and delay the Performance of those Mercies to us that we have long waited and prayed for.

2. That during that Delay and Suspension, our Hearts and Hopes may be very low, and ready to fail.

1. Providence may long delay the Performance of those Mercies we have prayed and waited upon God for.

For

For the right understanding of this, know that there is a twofold Term or Season fixed for the Performance of Mercy to us. One by the Lord our God, in whose hand Times and Seasons are, *Acts* 1. 7. Another by our selves, who raise up our own Expectations of Mercies, sometimes meerly through the Eagerness of our Desires after them, and sometimes upon uncertain conjectural grounds and appearances of Encouragement that lie before us.

Now nothing can be more precise, certain and punctual, than is the Performance of Mercy at the Time and Season which God hath appointed, how long soever it be, or how many Obstacles soever lie in the way of it. There was a Time prefixed by God himself for the Performance of that Promise of *Israel's* Deliverance out of Egypt; and it's said, *Exod.* 12. 41. *At the end of the four hundred and thirty Years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the Host of the Lord went out of the Land of Egypt.* Compare this with *Acts* 7. 17. and there you have the Ground and Reason why their Deliverance was not, nor could be delayed one Day longer, because *the Time of the Promise was now come.* Promises, like a pregnant Woman, must accomplish their appointed Months, and when they have so done, Providence will Midwife the Mercies they go big withal into the World, and not one of them shall miscarry.

But for the Seasons, which are of our own fixing and appointment, as God is not tyed to them, so his Providences are not governed by them: And hence are our Disappointments. *We looked for Peace, but no good came; for a Time of Health, and behold Trouble,* *Jer.* 8. 15. And hereupon is it that we fret at the Delays of Providence, and suspect

suspect the Faithfulness of God in their Performance. *But his Thoughts are not our Thoughts, Isa. 55. 8. The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise, as Men count Slackness, 2 Pet. 3. 9.* It is Slackness, if you reckon by our own Rule and Measure, but it is not so, if you reckon and count it by God's. The Lord doth not compute and reckon his Seasons of working by our *Arithmetick*. You have both these Rules compared, and the ground of our Mistake detected in that Scripture, *Hab. 2. 3. The Vision is yet for an appointed Time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lye: Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*

God appoints the Time: When that appointed Time is come, the expected Mercies will not fail: But in the mean time, *though it tarry* (saith the Prophet) *wait for it, for it will not tarry.* Tarry, and not tarry, how shall this be reconciled? The Meaning is, it may tarry much beyond your *Expectation*, but not a moment beyond God's *Appointment*.

2. During this delay of Providence, the Hearts and Hopes of the People of God may be very low, and much discouraged. This is too plain from what the Scriptures have recorded of others, and every one of us may find in our own Experiences. We have an Instance of this in *Isa. 49. 13, 14.* In the 13th Verse you have God's faithful Promise, that *he will comfort his People, and have Mercy upon his Afflicted.* Enough one would think to raise and comfort their Hearts. But the Mercy promised was long in coming, they waited from Year to Year, and still the Burthen pressed them, and was not removed. And therefore, *ver. 14. Zion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me, q. d. It's in vain*

vain to look for such a Mercy, God hath no regard to us, we are out of his Heart and Mind, he neither cares for us, nor minds what becomes of us.

So it was with *David*, after God had made him such a Promise, and in the Time thereof so faithfully performed it, that never was Mercy better secured to any Man; for they are call'd, *the sure Mercies of David*, *Isa. 55. 3.* Yet Providence delayed the accomplishment of them so long, and suffered such Difficulties to intervene, that he even despaired to see the Accomplishment of them, but even concludes God had forgotten him too, *Psal. 13. 1. How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever?* And what he speaks here by way of Question, he elsewhere turns into a positive Conclusion, *Psal. 116. 11. All Men are Liars, I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.* And the Causes of these Despondencies and Sinkings of Heart are partly from our selves, and partly from Satan. If we duly examine our own Hearts about it, we shall find that these Sinkings of Heart are,

1. The immediate Effects of Unbelief. We do not depend and rely upon the Word with that full Trust and Confidence that is due to the infallible Word of a faithful and unchangeable God. You may see the ground of this Faintness in that Scripture, *Psal. 27. 13. I had fainted unless I had believed.* Faith is the only Cordial that relieves the Heart against these Faintings and Despondencies. Where this is wanting, or is weak, no wonder our Hearts sink at this rate, when Discouragements are before us.

2. Our judging and measuring things by the Rules of Sense, this is a great Cause of our Discouragements.

agements. We conclude, According to the Appearances of things will be their Issues. If *Abraham* had done so, in that great Trial of his Faith, he had certainly lost his footing; *but against Hope, (i. e.) against natural Probability, he believed in Hope, giving Glory to God, Rom. 4. 18.* If *Paul* had done so, he had fainted under his Trials, *2 Cor. 4. 16, 18. We faint not (saith he) whilst we look not at the things that are seen, q. d. That which keeps up our Spirits, is our looking off from things present and visible, and measuring all by another Rule, viz. The Power and Fidelity of God firmly engaged in the Promises.*

3. In all these things *Satan* manages a Design upon us. Hence he takes Occasions to suggest hard Thoughts of God, and to beat off our Souls from all Confidence in him, and Expectations from him. He is the great Make-bate betwixt God and the Saints. He reports the Difficulties and Fears that are in our way with Advantage, and labours to weaken our Hands, and discourage our Hearts in waiting upon God. And these Suggestions gain the more Credit with us, because they are confirm'd and attested by Sense and Feeling.

But here is a desperate Design carrying on under very plausible Pretences against our Souls. It concerns us to be watchful now, and maintain our Faith and Hope in God. Now blessed is he that can resign all to God, and quietly wait for his Salvation. To assist the Soul in this Difficulty, I shall offer some farther Help beside what hath been formerly given under the *first Caution*, in the following Considerations.

First Consideration.

Though Providence do not yet perform the Mer-

Mercies you wait for, yet you have no ground to entertain hard Thoughts of God; for it's possible God never gave you any ground for your Expectation of these things from him. It may be you have no *Promise* to bottom your Hope upon; and if so, why shall God be suspected and dishonoured by you in a *Case* wherein his *Truth* and *Faithfulness* was never engaged to you? If we are crossed in our outward Concernments, and see our Expectations of Prosperity dashed; if we see such or such an outward Comfort removed, from which we promised our selves much; why must God be accused for this? These things you promised your selves: But where did God promise you Prosperity, and the Continuance of those comfortable things to you? Produce his Promise, and shew wherein he hath broken it. It is not enough for you to say, There are general Promises in the Scripture, that *God will withhold no good thing*, and these are good things which Providence with-holds from you; for that Promise, *Psalms*. 84. 11. hath its Limitations, it is expressly limited to such as *walk uprightly*; and it concerns you to examine whether you have done so, before you quarrel with Providence for Non-performance of it. Ah Friend, search thine own Heart, reflect upon thine own Ways; seest thou not so many Flaws in thine Integrity, so many Turnings aside from God, both in Heart and Life, that may justifie God, not only in with-holding what thou lookest for, but in removing all that thou enjoyest? And besides this Limitation as to the *Object*, it's limited (as all other Promises relating to Externals are) in the Matter or Things premised by the Wisdom and Will of God, which is the only Rule by which they are measured out

to Men in this World, (*i. e.*) such Mercies in such Proportions as he sees needful and most conducive to your good; and these given out in such Times and Seasons as are of his own Appointment, not yours.

God never came under an absolute unlimited Tye for outward Comforts to any of us; and if we be disappointed, we can blame none but ourselves. Who bid us expect Rest, Ease, Delight, and things of this kind in this World? He hath never told us, we shall be rich, healthy, and at ease in our Habitations; but on the contrary, he hath often told us, we must expect *Troubles in the World*, John 16. 33. And that *through many Tribulations we must enter into his Kingdom*, Acts 14. 22. All that he stands bound to us by Promise for, is to be *with us in trouble*, Psal. 91. 15. to supply our real and absolute Needs, *Isa. 41. 17. When the Poor and Needy seek Water, and there is none, and their Tongue faileth for Thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them*; and to sanctifie all these Providences to our Good at last, *Rom. 8. 28. All things shall work together for Good to them that love God*. And as to all these things not one Tittle ever did, or shall fail.

Second Consideration.

But if you say you have long waited upon God for spiritual Mercies to your Souls according to the Promise, and still those Mercies are deferred, and your Eyes fail whilst you look for them; I would desire you seriously to consider of what kind those spiritual Mercies are, for which you have so long waited upon God. Spiritual Mercies are of two sorts; such as belong to the *Essence*, the very being of the new Creature, without which it must fail; Or to its *well being*,
P and

and the Comfort of the inner Man; without which you cannot live so chearfully as you would. The Mercies of the former kind are absolutely necessary, and therefore put into absolute Promises, as you see, *Jer. 32. 40. And I will make an everlasting Covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my Fear in their Hearts, that they shall not depart from me.* But for the rest they are dispensed to us in such Measures, and at such Seasons as the Lord sees fit, and many of his own People live for a long time without them. The Donation and Continuation of the Spirit, to quicken, sanctifie and unite us with Christ is necessary, but his Joys and Comforts are not so. A Child of Light may walk in Darkness, *Isa. 50. 10.* He lives by Faith, and not by Feeling.

Third Consideration.

You complain, Providence delays to perform to you the Mercies you have prayed and waited for; but have you right Ends in your Desires after these Mercies? It may be that's the Cause, you ask and receive not, *James 4. 3.* The want of a good Aim, is the Reason why we want good Success in our Prayers. It may be we pray for Prosperity, and our End is to please the Flesh; we look no higher than the Pleasure and Accommodation of the Flesh, we beg and wait for Deliverance from such a Trouble and Affliction, not that we might be the more expedite and prepared for Obedience, but freed of what is grievous to us, and destroys our Pleasure in the World.

Certainly if it be so, you have more need to judge and condemn your selves, than to censure and suspect the Care of God.

Fourth

The Mystery of Providence.

215

Fourth Consideration.

You wait for Good, and it comes not ; but is your Will brought to a due Submission to the Will of God about it? Certainly God will have you come to this before you enjoy your Desires. Enjoyment of your Desires is the thing that will please you, but Resignation of your Wills, is that which is pleasing to God : If your Hearts cannot come to this, Mercies cannot come to you. *David* was made to wait long for the Mercy promised him, yea, and to be content without it before he enjoyed it, *Psalms* 131. 2. He was brought to be as a weaned Child, and so must you.

Fifth Consideration.

Your Betters have waited long upon God for Mercy, and why should not you? *David* waited till his Eyes failed, *Psal.* 69. 3. The Church waited for him in the Way of his Judgments, *Isa.* 26. 8. Are you better than all the Saints that are gone before you? Is God more obliged to you, than to all his People? They have quietly waited, and why should not you?

Sixth Consideration.

Will you lose any thing by patient waiting upon God for Mercies? Certainly, not at all: Yea, it will turn to a double Advantage to you to continue in a quiet submissive waiting Posture upon God. For, (1.) Though you do not yet enjoy the Good you wait for, yet all this while you are exercising your Grace; and it's more excellent to act Grace, than to enjoy Comfort. All this while the Lord is training you up in the Exercise of Faith and Patience, and bending your Wills in Submission to himself; and what do you lose by that? Yea, and, (2.) When ever

the desired Mercy comes, it will be so much the sweeter to you: For, look how much Faith and Prayer hath been employed to produce it, how many Wrestlings you have had with God for it, so many more Degrees of Sweetness you will find in it, when it comes. O therefore, faint not, how long soever God delay you.

Seventh Consideration.

Are not those Mercies you expect from God worth the waiting for? If not, it is your Folly to be troubled for the want of them: If they be, why don't you continue waiting? Is it not all that God expects from you for the Mercies he bestows upon you, that you wait upon him for them? You know you have not deserved the least of them at his Hands. You expect them not as a *Recompence*, but a *free Favour*, and if so, then certainly the least you can do, is to wait upon his Pleasure for them.

Eighth Consideration.

Consider how many Promises are made in the Word to waiting Souls. One Scripture calls them *blessed that wait for him*, Isa. 30. 18. Another tells us, *none that wait for him shall be ashamed*, Psalm 25. 3. (*i. e.*) they shall not be finally disappointed, but at last be Partakers of their Hopes. A third Scripture tells us, *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their Strength*, Isa. 40. 31. a Promise you had need make much use of in such a fainting Time, with many more of like Nature; and shall we faint at this rate in the midst of so many Cordials as are prepared to revive us in these Promises?

Ninth Consideration.

How long hath God waited upon you when you will comply with his Commands, come up

to your Engagements and Promises? You have made God wait long for your Reformation and Obedience; and therefore have no Reason to think it much, if God make you wait long for your Consolation. We have our *How long*, and hath not God his? We cry, *Psalms 6. 3. But thou, O Lord, how long? Psalm 13. 1, 2. How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy Face from me? How long shall I take Counsel in my Soul, having Sorrow in my Heart daily? How long shall mine Enemy be exalted over me?* But surely we should not think these things long, when we consider, how long the Lord hath exercised his Patience about us. We have made him say, *How long, how long? Our Unbelief hath made him cry, How long will it be ere they believe me? Numb. 14. 11. Our corrupt Hearts have made him cry, How long shall vain Thoughts lodge within thee? Jer. 4. 14. Our impure Natures and Ways have made him cry, How long will it be ere they attain to Innocency? Hosea 8. 5. If God wait upon you with so much Patience for your Duties, well may you wait upon him for his Mercies.*

Tenth Consideration.

This Impatience and Infidelity of yours, expressed in your Weariness to wait any longer, as it is a great Evil in it self, so very probably it is that Evil which obstructs the way of your expected Mercies; You might have your Mercies sooner, if your Spirits were quieter and more submissive. *And thus of the Second Case.*

The Third Case.

How may a Christian discern when a Providence is sanctified, and comes from the Love of God to him?

There are two sorts or kinds of Providences ver-
sant about Men in this World, the Issues and E-
vents of which are vastly different, yea, contra-
ry to each other.

1. To some all Providences are over-ruled and
ordered for Good, according to that blessed Pro-
mise, *Rom. 8. 28.* Not only things that are good
in themselves, as Ordinances, Graces, Duties
and Mercies; but things that are Evil in them-
selves, as Temptations, Afflictions, and even
their Sins and Corruptions shall turn in the Issue
to their Advantage and Benefit. For though
Sin be so *intrinsically* and *formally* Evil in its own
Nature, that in it self it be not capable of Sancti-
fication; yet out of this worst of Evils God can
work Good to his People; and though he never
make Sin the *Instrument* of Good, yet his Provi-
dence may make it the *Occasion* of Good to his
People; so that Spiritual Benefits may by the
wise over-ruling of Providence be occasioned to
the People of God by it.

And so for Afflictions of all kinds, the great-
est and forest of them; they do work in the In-
fluence of Providence a great deal of Good to
the Saints, and that not only as the Occasions,
but as the Instruments and Means of it, *Isa. 27.*
9. By this shall the Iniquity of Jacob be purged,
(i. e.) by the Instrumentality of this sanctified
Affliction.

2. To others nothing is sanctified either as an
Instrument or Occasion of any spiritual Good;
but as the worst things are ordered to the Bene-
fit of the Saints, so the best things wicked Men
enjoy do them no good. Their Prayers are turned
into Sin, *Psalms 109. 7.* The Ordinances are the
Favour of Death, *2 Cor. 2. 16.* The Grace of
God

God turned into Wantonness, *Jude*, ver. 4. Christ himself a Rock of Offence, *1 Pet.* 2. 8. Their Table a Snare, *Psal.* 69. 22. Their Prosperity their Ruin, *Prov.* 1. 32. As Persons are, so things work for good or evil, *Tit.* 1. 15. *To the Pure all things are pure, but to them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure.* Seeing therefore the Events of Providence fall out so opposite to each other upon the Godly and Ungodly; every thing farthering the Eternal Good of the one, and the Ruin of the other; it cannot but be acknowledged a most important Case in which every Soul is deeply concern'd, whether the Providences under which he is, be sanctified to him or no?

For the clearing of which I shall premise two necessary Considerations, and then subjoin the Rules which will be useful for the Determination of the Question.

And first, Let it be considered, that we cannot know from the Matter of the Things before us, whether they be sanctified or un sanctified to us; for so consider'd, *All things come alike to all; and no Man knoweth either Love or Hatred by all the things that are before him*, *Eccles.* 9. 1, 2. We cannot understand the Mind and Heart of God, by the things he dispenseth with his Hand. If prosperous Providences befall us, we cannot say, Herein is a sure Sign that God loves me; for who have more of those Providences than the People of his Wrath? *Psalms* 73. 7. *They have more than their Hearts can wish.* Sure that must be a weak Evidence for Heaven, which accompanies so great a part of the World to Hell. By these things we may testifie our Love to God; but from ten thousand such Enjoyments we cannot get any solid Assurance of his Love to us.

And from adverse afflictive Providences we cannot know his Hatred. If Afflictions, great Afflictions, many Afflictions, long continued Afflictions should set a Brand, or fix a Character of God's Hatred upon the Persons on whom they fall; where then shall we find God's People in the World? We must then seek out the proud, vain, sensual Wantons of the World, who spend their Days in Pleasure, and say, these are the Men whom God loves.

Outward things are promiscuously dispensed, and no Man's spiritual Estate is discernable by the view of his temporal. When God draws the Sword, it may cut off the Righteous as well as the Wicked, Ezek. 21. 3.

2. Tho' the Providences of God, materially considered, afford no Evidence of God's Love to us, yet the Manner in which they befall us, and the Effects and Fruits they produce in us, do distinguish them very manifestly; and by them we may discern whether they be sanctified Providences, and Fruits of the Love of God, or no. But yet these Effects and Fruits of Providences, by which we discern their Nature, do not always presently appear; but Time must be allowed for the Soul's Exercise under them: As it is Heb. 12.

11. *Now no Affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

The Benefit of a Providence is discern'd as that of a Medicine is; for the present it gripes, and makes the Stomach sick and loathing; but afterwards we find the benefit of it in our recovery of Health and Cheerfulness. Now the Providences of God being some of them comfortable, and others

others sad and grievous to Nature, and the way to discern the Sanctification and Blessing of them being, by the manner in which they come, and their Operations upon our Spirits; I shall consider the Case as it respects both sorts of Providences, and shew you what Effects of our Troubles or Comforts will speak them to be sanctified and blessed to us.

And first for sad and afflictive Providences in what kind or degree soever they befall us, we may warrantably conclude they are Blessings to us, and come from the Love of God, when

1. They come in a proper Season, when we have need of them, either to prevent some Sin we are falling into, or recover us out of a remiss, supine, and careless Frame of Spirit into which we are already fallen, 1 Pet. I. 6. *If need be, ye are in Heaviness.* Certainly, it is a good sign that God designs your good by those Troubles which are so fitted and wisely order'd to nick the Opportunity. If you see the Husbandman lopping a Tree in the proper Season, it argues he aims at the Fruitfulness and Flourishing of it; but to do the same thing at *Midsummer* speaks no regard to it, yea, his design to destroy it.

2. When they are fitted, both for *Quality* and *Degree*, to work properly upon our most predominant Corruptions, then they look like sanctified Strokes. The Wisdom of God is much seen in the choice of his Rods. It is not any kind of Trouble that will work upon and purge every Sin; but when God chuses for such Afflictions as, like Physick, are appropriated to the Disease the Soul labours under; this speaks Divine Care and Love. Thus we may observe, it's usual with God to smite us in those very Comforts, which

stole

stole away too much of the Love and Delight of our Souls from God; to cross us in those things from which we raised up too great Expectations of Comfort. These Providences speak the Jealousy of God over us, and his Care to prevent far worse Evils by these sad, but needful Strokes. And so for the Degrees of our Troubles, sanctified Strokes are *ordinarily* fitted by the Wisdom of God to the Strength and Ability of our inherent Grace, *Isa. 17. 8. In measure when it shooteth forth thou wilt debate with it: He stayeth his rough Wind in the Day of the East Wind.* It's an Allusion to a Physician, who exactly weighs and measures all the Ingredients, which he mingles in a Potion for his sick Patient, that it may be proportionate to his Strength, and no more: and so much the next Words intimate, *By this therefore shall the Iniquity of Jacob be purged.*

3. It is a good sign our Troubles are sanctified to us, when they turn our Hearts against Sin, and not against God. There be few great Afflictions which befall Men, but they make them quarrellous and discontented. Wicked Men quarrel with God, and are filled with Discontent against him. So the Scripture describes them, *Rev. 17. 9. They were scorched with great Heat, and blasphemed the Name of God, which hath Power over these Plagues.* But Godly Men, to whom Afflictions are sanctified, they justify God, and fall out with Sin, they condemn themselves, and give Glory to God, *Dan. 9. 7. O Lord, Righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us Confusion of Faces, &c.* And *Lam. 3. 39. Wherefore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins?* Happy Afflictions, which make the Soul fall out and quarrel only with Sin.

4. It is a sure sign afflicting Providences are sanctified, when they purge the Heart from Sin, and leave both Heart and Life more pure, heavenly, mortified, and humble than they found them. Sanctified Afflictions are Cleansers, they pull down the Pride, refine the Earthliness, and purge out the Vanity of the Spirit. So you read, *Dan. 11. 35.* it purifies and makes their Souls white. Hence it's compared to a *Furnace*, which separates the Dross from the pure Mettal, *Isa. 48. 10.* *Behold I have refined thee, but not with Silver: I have chosen thee in the Furnace of Affliction.* But for wicked Men, let them be never so long in the *Furnace*, they lose no Dross, *Ezek. 24. 6.* How many Christians can bear witness to this Truth! After some sharp Affliction hath been upon them, how is the Earthliness of their Hearts purged! they see no Beauty, taste no more Relish in the World than in the White of an Egg. Oh how serious, humble and heavenly are they, till the Impressions made upon them by the Afflictions be worn off, and their deceitful Lusts have again entangled them! And this is the Reason why we are so often under the Discipline of the Rod. Let a Christian (saith a late Writer) be but two or three Years without an Affliction, and he is almost good for nothing: He cannot pray, nor meditate, nor discourse at that rate he was wont to do; but when a new Affliction comes, now he can find his Tongue, and come to his Knees again, and live at another rate.

5. It is a good sign afflicting Providences are sanctified to us, when we draw near to God under them, and turn to him that smites us. A wicked Man under Affliction revolts more and more, *Isa. 1. 5.* *turns not to him that smites him, Isa. 9. 13.* but grows

grows worse than before : Formality is turned into Stupidity and Dedolency.

But if God afflict his own People with a sanctified Rod, it awakens them to a more earnest Seeking of God ; it makes them pray more frequently, spiritually and fervently than ever. When *Paul* was buffeted by Satan, he besought the Lord thrice, 2 Cor. 12. 8.

6. We may conclude our Afflictions to be sanctified, and to come from the Love of God to us, when they do not alienate our Hearts from God, but inflame our Love to him. This is a sure Rule, Whatever ends in the Increase of our Love to God, proceeds from the Love of God to us. A wicked Man finds his Heart rising against God, when he smites him ; but a gracious Heart cleaves the closer to him : He can love as well as justify an afflicting God. *All this is come upon us ; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy Covenant : our Heart is not turned back, neither have our Steps declined from thy way ; tho' thou hast sore broken us in the Place of Dragons, and covered us with the Shadow of Death,* Psal. 44. 17, 18, 19. Here you have a true account of the Temper and Frame of a gracious Soul under greatest Afflictions. To be broken in the Place of Dragons, and covered with the Shadow of Death, imports the most dismal State of Affliction : Yet even then a gracious Heart turns not back, i. e. doth not for all this abate one Drachm of Love to God : God is as good and dear to him in Afflictions as ever.

7. Lastly, We may call our Afflictions sanctified, when *Divine Teachings* accompany them to our Souls, Psal. 94. 12. *Blessed is the Man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy Law.* Sanctified Afflictions are *Eye-salves*, they teach us
sensi-

sensibly and effectually when the Spirit accompanies them; the Evil of Sin, the Vanity of the Creature, the Necessity of securing things that cannot be shaken. Never doth a Christian take a truer Measure both of his Corruptions and Graces, than under the Rod. Now a Man sees that Filthiness that hath been long contracting in Prosperity, what Interest the Creature hath in the Heart, how little Faith, Patience, Resignation and self-denial we can find, when God calls us to the Exercise of them. O 'tis a blessed Sign, that Trouble is sanctified, that makes a Man thus turn it upon his own Heart, search it, and humble himself before the Lord for the Evils of it!

2. In the next Place let us take into Consideration the other Branch of Providences which are comfortable and pleasant. Sometimes it smiles upon us in Successes, Prosperity, and the Gratification of the Desires of our Hearts. Here the Question will be how the Sanctification of these Providences may be discovered to us? For Resolution in this Matter, I shall for Clearness sake lay down two sorts of Rules; one Negative, the other Positive.

First Negative.

1. It is a sign, that Comfort is not sanctified to us, which comes not (ordinarily) in the Way of Prayer. *The wicked boasteth of his Hearts Desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. The wicked through the Pride of his Countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts, Psal.*

10. 3, 4. Here you see Providence may give Men *their Hearts Desire*, and yet they never once open their Desires to God in Prayer about it. But then those Gifts of Providence are only such as are bestowed on the worst of Men, and are not the Fruits of Love.

2. What-

2. Whatever Success, Prosperity or Comfort Men acquire by sinful *Mediums*, and indirect Courses, are not sanctified Mercies to them. This is not the Method in which those Mercies are bestowed. *Better is a little with Righteousness, than great Revenues without Right*, Prov. 16. 8. Better upon this Account, that it comes in God's Way, and with his Blessing, which never follows the way of Sin. God hath cursed the ways of Sin, and no Blessing can follow them.

3. Whatever Prosperity and Success makes Men forget God, and cast off the Care of Duty, is not sanctified to them. It is unsanctified Prosperity, which lulls Men asleep into a deep Oblivion of God, *Deut. 32. 13, 14, 15, 18. He made him ride on the high Places of the Earth, that he might eat the Increase of the Fields; and he made him to suck Honey out of the Rock, and Oyl out of the flinty Rock, Butter of Kine, and Milk of Sheep, with Fat of Lambs, and Rams of the Breed of Bashan, and Goats, with the Fat of Kidneys of Wheat, and thou didst drink the pure Blood of the Grape; but Jesurum waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art cover'd with Fatness: Then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his Salvation. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. Rare fumant felicitibus ara.*

4. When Prosperity is abused to Sensuality, and meerly serves as Fuel to maintain fleshly Lusts, it is not sanctified. See *Job 21. 11, 12, 13. They send forth their little ones like a Flock, and their Children dance. They take the Timbrel and Harp, and rejoice at the Sound of the Organ. They spend their Days in Wealth, and in a Moment go down to the Grave.*

5. It's a Sign that Prosperity is not sanctified to Men, when it swells the Heart with Pride and Self-conceitdness, *Dan. 4. 29, 30. At the End of twelve Months he walked in the Palace of the Kingdom of Babylon. The King spake and said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the House of the Kingdom, by the Might of my Power, and for the Honour of my Majesty?*

6. That Success is not sanctified to Men, which takes them off from their Duty, and makes them wholly negligent, or very much indisposed to it, *Jer. 2. 31. O Generation, see the Word of the Lord; have I been a Wilderness unto Israel? A Land of Darkness? Wherefore say my People, We are Lords, we will come no more unto thee?*

7. Nor can we think that Prosperity sanctified, which wholly swallows up the Souls of Men in their own Enjoyments, and makes them regardless of publick Miseries or Sins, *Amos 6. 4, 5, 6. They lie upon Beds of Ivory, and stretch themselves upon their Couches, and eat the Lambs out of the Flock, and the Calves out of the midst of the Stall. They chant to the Sound of the Viol, and invent to themselves Instruments of Musick like David. They drink Wine in Bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief Ointments; but they are not grieved for the Afflictions of Joseph.*

But then Positively.

1. Those Mercies and Comforts are undoubtedly sanctified to Men, which humble their Souls kindly before God, in the Sense of their own Vileness and Unworthiness of them, *Gen. 32. 10. And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy Mercies, &c.*

2. Sanctified Mercies are commonly turned into Cautions against Sin, *Ecc. 9. 13. they are so*

so many Bands of Restraint upon the Soul that hath them, to make them shun Sin.

3. They will engage a Man's Heart in love to the God of his Mercies, *Psal. 18. 1.* compared with the Title.

4. They never satisfy a Man as his Portion, nor will the Soul accept all the Prosperity in the World upon that Score, *Heb. 11. 26. Esteeming the Reproach of Christ greater Riches than the Treasures in Egypt: for he had Respect unto the Recompence of the Reward.*

5. Nor do they make Men regardless of public Sins or Miseries, *Neb. 2. 1, 2, 3.* compared with *Acts 7. 23.*

6. It's a sure sign that Mercies are sanctified, when they make the Soul more expedite and enlarged for God in Duty, *2 Chron. 17. 5, 6. Therefore the Lord stablished the Kingdom in his Hand, and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat Presents, and he had Riches and Honour in abundance, and his Heart was lift up in the Ways of the Lord, &c.*

7. To conclude, that which is obtained by Prayer, and returned to God again in due Praise carries his own Testimonials with it, that it came from the Love of God, and is a sanctified Mercy to the Soul. *And so much of this Third Case.*

The Fourth Case.

How may we attain unto an Evenness and Steadiness of Spirit, under the Changes and contrary Aspects of Providence upon us?

Three things are supposed in this Case.

1. That Providence hath various and contrary Aspects upon the People of God.

2. That it is a common thing with them, to experience great Disorders of Spirit, under those Changes of Providence.

3. That

3. That these Disorders may be (at least in a great Measure) prevented, by the due Use and Application of those Rules and Helps that God hath given us in such Cases.

1. That Providence hath various, yea, contrary Aspects upon the People of God, is a Case so plain, that it needs no more than the mentioning, to let it in to all our Understandings. Which of all the People of God have not felt this truth? Providence rings the Changes all the World over; *He encreaseth the Nations, and destroyeth them; he enlargeth the Nations, and straitneth them again, Job 12. 23.* The same it doth with Persons, *Psal. 102. 10. Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.* See what a sad Alteration Providence made upon the Church, *Lam. 1. 1, 12. How doth the City sit solitary that was full of People! How is she become as a Widow! She that was great among the Nations, and Princess among the Provinces, how is she become tributary! Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see, if there be any Sorrow like unto my Sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the Day of his fierce Anger.* And how great an Instance was *Joh* of this Truth, *Joh 29. per tot. and 30 compared? How many thousands have complained with Naomi, whose Condition hath been so strangely altered, that others have said, as the People of Bethlehem did of her, Is this Naomi? Ruth 1. 19, 20, 21.*

These Vicissitudes of Providence commonly cause great Disorders of Spirit in the best Men. Look as intense *Heat* and *Cold* try the Strength and Soundness of the Constitution of our Bodies, so the *Alterations* made by Providence upon our Conditions, try the Strength of our Graces; and too often discover the Weakness and Corruption

of holy Men. *Hezekiab* was a good Man : but yet his Weakness and Corruption was bewrayed by the Alterations Providence made upon his Conditions. When Sickness and Pains summon'd him to the Grave, what bitter Complaints and Despondencies are recorded ? in *Isa.* 38. *per tot.* And when Providence lifted him up again into a prosperous Condition, what Ostentation and Vain-glory did he discover ? *Isa.* 39. 2. *David* had more than a common Stock of inherent Grace, yet not enough to keep him in an equal Temper of Spirit under great Alterations, *Psalms* 130. 6, 7. *In my Prosperity I said I shall never be moved ; thou hidest thy Face, and I was troubled.* It is not every Man that can say with *Paul*, *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound every where, and in all things I am instructed both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer Need,* *Phil.* 4. 12. He is truly rich in Grace, whose Riches or Poverty neither hinders the acting, nor impoverisheth the Stock of his Graces.

3. Though the best Men be subject to such Disorders of Heart, under the Changes of Providence ; yet these Disorders may in a great Measure be prevented by the due Application of such Rules and Helps, as God hath given us in such Cases.

Now, these *Helps* are suited to a threefold Aspect of Providence upon us : viz.

1. Comfortable,
2. Calamitous,
3. Doubtful.

To all which I shall speak particularly and briefly.

Quest.

Quest. I.

How may we attain to an Evenness and Steadiness of Heart, under the comfortable Aspects of Providence upon us?

Under Providences of this kind, the great Danger is, lest the Heart be lifted up with Pride and Vanity, and fall into a drowsie and remiss Temper. To prevent this, we had need urge humbling and awakening Considerations upon our own Hearts; such are these that follow.

First Consideration.

These Gifts of Providence are common to the worst of Men, and are no special distinguishing Fruits of God's Love. The vilest of Men have been filled even to Satiety with these things, *Psal. 73. 7. Their Eyes stand out with Fatness: They have more than Heart could wish.*

Second Consideration.

Think how unstable and changeable all these things are. What you glory in to day may be none of yours to morrow, *Prov. 23. 5. Riches make themselves Wings, and fly away as an Eagle towards Heaven.* As the Wings of a Fowl grow out of the Substance of the Body, so the Cause of the Creatures Transitoriness is in it self: It's subjected to *Vanity*, and that *Vanity*, like Wings, carries it away: they are but *fading Flowers*, *James I. 10.*

Third Consideration.

The Change of Providences is never nearer to the People of God, than when their Hearts are lifted up, or grown secure by Prosperity. Doth *Hezekiah* glory in his Treasures? The next News he hears, is of an impoverishing Providence at hand, *Isa. 39. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.* Others may be left to perish in unsanctified Prosperity, but you shall not.

Divine Conduct : Or,

Fourth Consideration.

This is a great Discovery of the Carnality and Corruption that is in thy Heart : It argues an Heart little set upon God, little mortified to the World, little acquainted with the Vanity and ensnaring Nature of these things. O you know not what Hearts you have, till such Providences try them. And is not such a Discovery Matter of deep Humiliation ?

Fifth Consideration.

Was it not better with you in a low Condition than it is now ? Reflect, and compare State with State, and Time with Time. How is the Frame of your Hearts altered with the Alteration of your Condition ? So God complains of Israel, Hosea 13. 5, 6. *I did know thee in the Wilderness, the Land of Drought ; according to their Pasture so they were filled ; they were filled, and their Heart was exalted, therefore have they forgotten me, saith the Lord : q. d.* You and I were better acquainted formerly, when you were in a low Condition ; Prosperity hath estranged you, and alter'd the Case. How sad is it, that God's Mercies should be the Occasion of our Estrangement from him ?

Quest. 2.

Upon the other side, it's worth considering how our Hearts may be establish'd and kept steady under calamitous and adverse Providences.

Here we are in equal Danger of the other Extream, viz. Despondency and Sinking under the Frowns and Strokes of cross Providences. Now to support, and establish the Heart in this Case, take three Helps.

First Consideration.

First, consider, That afflictive Providences are

The Mystery of Providence.

333

are of great Use to the People of God, they cannot live without them. The Earth doth not more need chastening Frosts, and mellowing Snows, than our Hearts do nipping Providences. Let the best Christian be but a few Years without them, and he will be sensible of the want of them; he will find a sad *remission* and declining upon all his Graces.

Second Consideration.

No Stroke of Calamity upon the People of God, can *separate* them from Christ, *Rom. 8. 35. Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ? Shall Tribulation?* There was a Time when Job could call nothing in this World but *Trouble* his own: He could not say, my Estate, my Honour, my Health, my Children; for all these were gone; yet then he could say, *My Redeemer*, Job 19. 25. Well then, there is no Cause to sink whilst Interest in Christ remains sure to us.

Third Consideration.

All your Calamities will have an End shortly. The longest Day of the Saints Troubles hath an End; and then no more Troubles forever. The Troubles of the Wicked will be to Eternity; but you shall *suffer but a while*, 1 Pet. 5. 10. If a thousand Troubles be appointed for you, they will come to one at last, and after that no more: Yea, and though our Troubles be but for a Moment, yet they work for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory. Let that support your Hearts under all your Sufferings.

Quest. 3.

Lastly, Let us consider, what may be useful to support and quiet our Hearts under *doubtful Providences*, when our dear Concernments hang in a doubtful Suspence before us, and we know not

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which

Divine Conduct: Or,

which Way the Providence of God will cast and determine them.

Now the best Hearts are apt to grow solicitous and pensive, distracted with Thoughtfulness about the Event and Issue. To relieve and settle us in this Case, the following Considerations are very useful.

First Consideration.

First, Let us consider the Vanity and Inutility of such a Solitude, *Matth. 6. 27. Which of you (saith our Lord) by taking Thought can add one Cubit?* We may break our Peace, and waist our Spirits, but not alter the Case. We cannot turn God out of his Way, *Job 23. 13. He is in one Mind.* We may by struggling against God increase, but not avoid or lighten our Troubles.

Second Consideration.

How often do we afflict and torment our selves by our own unquiet Thoughts, when there is no real Cause or Ground for so doing? *Isa. 51. 13. ——— And hast fear'd continually every Day, because of the Fury of the Oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy, and where is the Fury of the Oppressor?* O what abundance of Disquiet and Trouble might we prevent, by waiting quietly till we see the Issues of Providence, and not bringing, as we do, the Evils of the Morrow upon the Day?

Third Consideration.

How great Ground of Quietness is it that the whole Dispose and Management of all our Affairs and Concerns is in the Hand of our own God and Father! No Creature can touch us without his Commission or Permission. *I know (saith Christ) thou couldst have no Power against me, except it were given thee from above, John 19. 11.*
Neither

The Mystery of Providence.

235

Neither Men nor Devils can act any thing without God's leave ; and be sure he will sign no Order to your Prejudice.

Fourth Consideration.

How great Satisfaction must it be to all that believe the Divine Authority of the Scripture, that the Faithfulness of God stands engaged for every Line and Syllable found therein? And how many blessed Lines in the Bible may we mark, that respect even our outward Concerns, and the happy Issue of them all? Upon these two grounds, *viz.* That our outward Concerns, with their steady Direction to a blessed End, is found in the Word ; and this Word being of Divine Authority, the Faithfulness and Honour of God stands good for every Tittle that is found there. I say, these are Grounds of such Stability, that our Minds may repose with greatest Security and Confidence upon them, even in the cloudiest Day of Trouble. Not only your Eternal Salvation, but your temporal Interests are there secured. Be quieted therefore in the Confidence of a blessed Issue.

Fifth Consideration.

How great and sure an Expedient have the Saints ever found it to their own Peace, to commit all doubtful Issues of Providence to the Lord, and devolve all their Cares upon him ; *Prov.* 16. 3. *Commit thy Works unto the Lord, and thy Thoughts shall be established.* By *Works* he means any doubtful, intricate, perplexing Business, about which our Thoughts are rackt and tortur'd. Roll all these upon the Lord by Faith, leave them with him, and the present immediate Benefit you shall have by it (besides the Comfort in the last Issue) shall be Tranquility and Peace in your Thoughts.

And who is there of any standing or experience in Religion, that hath not found it so?

The Fifth. Case.

How may a Christian work his Heart into a resigning Frame unto the Will of God, when sad Providences approach him, and presage great Troubles and Afflictions coming on towards him?

For the right stating and resolving of this important Case, it will be needful to shew, 1. What is not included and intended in the Question. 2. What it doth suppose and include in it; and lastly, what Helps and Directions are necessary for the due Performance of this great and difficult Duty.

First, *Negatively.*

As to the first, It must be premised, that the Question doth not suppose the Heart or Will of a Christian to be at his own command and dispose in this Matter, we cannot resign it, and subject it to the Will of God whenever we desire so to do: The Duty indeed is *ours*, but the Power by which alone we perform it is *God's*: We act as we are acted by the Spirit. It is with our Hearts, as with *Meteors* hanging in the Air, by the influence of the Sun; while that continues, they abide above, but when it fails, they fall to the Earth: We can do this, and all things else, be they never so difficult, *through Christ that strengthens us*, Phil. 4. 13. But *without him we can do nothing*, John 15. 5. He doth not say, without me ye can do but little, or without me ye can do nothing but with great difficulty, or without me ye can do nothing perfectly; but without me ye can do nothing at all. And every Christian hath a Witness in his own Breast to attest this Truth: For there are Cases frequently occurring

cursing in the Methods of Providence, in which, notwithstanding all their Prayers and Desires, all their Reasonings and Strivings, they cannot quiet their Hearts fully in the Dispose and Will of God; but on the contrary, do find all their Endeavours in this matter to be but as the rolling of a returning Stone against the Hill: Till God say to the Heart, Be still; and to the Will, Give up, nothing can be done.

Secondly, *Affirmatively.*

Next, Let us consider what this Case doth suppose, and include in it, and we shall find,

1. That it supposeth the People of God to have a Foresight of Troubles and Distresses approaching and drawing near to them: I confess 'tis not always so, for many of our Afflictions, as well as Comforts, come by way of *Surprizals* upon us: But oft-times we have Forewarnings of Troubles both *Publick* and *Personal*, before we feel them: As the Weather may be discerned by the Face of the Sky, when we see a Morning Sky red and lowring, this is a natural Sign of a foul and rainy Day, *Matth. 16. 3.* And there are as certain Signs of the Times, whereby we may discern when Trouble is near, even at the Door: And these Forewarnings are given by the Lord to awaken us to our Duties, by which they may either be prevented, *Zeph. 2. 1, 2.* or sanctified and sweetened to us when they come. These Signs and Notices of approaching Troubles are gathered *partly* from the Observation and Collation of parallel Scripture Cases and Examples, God generally holding one Tenour and steddy Course in the Administrations of his Providences in all Ages, *1 Cor. 10. 6.* *partly* from the Reflections Christians make upon the Frames and Tempers of their

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own Hearts, which greatly need awakening, humbling and purging Providences. For let a Christian be but a few Years or Months without a Rod, and how formal, earthly, dead and vain will his Heart grow? And such a Temper pre-sages Affliction to them that are beloved of the Lord, as really as the giving or sweating of the Stones doth Rain. Lastly, The ordering and disposing of the next Causes into a Posture and Preparation for our Trouble, plainly premonisheth us that Trouble is at the Door. Thus when the Symptoms of Sickness begin to appear upon our own Bodies, the Wife of our Bosom, or our Children, that are as our own Souls, Providence herein awakens our Expectations of Death and doleful Separations: So when Enemies combine together, and plot the Ruin of our Liberties, Estates, or Lives, and God seemeth to loose the Bridle of Restraint upon their Necks, now we cannot but be alarmed with the near Approach of Troubles, especially when at the same time our Conscience shall reflect upon the Abuse and Non-improvement of these our threatned Comforts.

2. The Case before us supposeth, that these Premonitions and Fore-runners of Affliction do usually very much disturb the Order, and break the Peace of our Souls; they put the Mind under great Discomposure, the Thoughts under much Distraction, and the Affections into Tumults and Rebellion.

Ah how unwilling are we to surrender to the Lord the Loan which he lent us! To be disquieted by Troubles, when at ease in our Enjoyments! How unwelcome are the Messengers of Affliction to the best of Men! We are ready to say to them as the Widow to *Elijah*, *What have I to do with thee,*

The Mystery of Providence.

239

thee, O Man (O Messenger) of God, art thou come unto me to call my Sin to remembrance, and to slay my Son? 1 Kings 17. 18. And this ariseth partly from the Remains of Corruption in the best Souls; for tho' every sanctified Person is come by his own Consent into the Kingdom, and under the Government and Scepter of Christ, and every Thought of his Heart *de jure*, and of right, must be subjected to him, 2 Cor. 10. 5. yet *de facto* the Conquest and Power of Grace is but incompleat and in part, and natural Corruption, like *Jero-boam* with his vain Men, riseth up against it, and causeth many Mutinies in the Soul, whilst Grace like young *Abijah*, is weak handed, and cannot resist them. And partly from the Advantage Satan makes upon the Season to irritate and assist our Corruptions: He knows that which is already in motion, is the more easily moved. In this Confusion and Hurry of Thoughts he undiscernedly shuffles in his Temptations. Sometimes aggravating he Evils which we fear, with all the sinking and overwhelming Circumstances imaginable; sometimes divining and forecasting such Events and Evils, as (haply) never fall out. Sometimes repining at the Disposes of God, as more severe to us than others; and sometimes reflecting with very unbelieving and unworthy Thoughts upon the Promises of God, and his Faithfulness in them, by all which the Affliction is made to sink deep into the Soul, before it actually comes. The Thoughts are so disordered, that Duty cannot be duly performed; and the Soul is really weakned and disabled to bear its tryal when it comes indeed: Just as if a Man should be kept waking and restless all the Night with the Thoughts of his hard Journey which he must

must travel to Morrow; and so when to Morrow is come, he faints for want of Rest, midway his Journey.

3. It is here suppos'd to be the Christian's great Duty, under the Apprehensions of approaching Troubles, to resign his Will to God's, and quietly commit the Events and Issues of all to him, whatever they may prove. Thus did *David* in the like Case and Circumstances, 2 Sam. 15. 25, 26. And the King said unto Zadock, carry back the Ark of God into the City. If I shall find favour in the Eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back again, and shew me both it and his Habitation: But if he shall thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him.

O lovely and truly Christian Temper! q. d. Go, Zadock, return with the Ark to its place, tho' I have not the Symbol, yet I hope I shall have the real Presence of God with me in this sad Journey: How he will dispose the Events of this sad and doubtful Providence, I know not: Either I shall return again to *Jerusalem*, or I shall not: If I do, then I shall see it again, and enjoy the Lord in his Ordinances there. If I do not, then I shall go to that Place where there is no need or use of those things. And either way it will be well for me, I am content to refer all to the Divine Pleasure, and commit the Issue, be it whatever it will be, to the Lord.

And till our Hearts come to the like Resolve, we can have no Peace within. Commit thy Works unto the Lord, and thy Thoughts shall be established, Prov. 16. 3. By Works he means not only every Enterprize and Business we undertake, but every puzzling, intricate, and doubtful Event we fear. These being once committed by an Act of Faith,
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and our Wills resigned unto his, besides the Comfort we shall have in the Issue, we shall have the present advantage of a well composed, and peaceful Spirit.

But this Resignation is the difficulty ; no doubt of Peace, could we once bring our Hearts to that. And therefore,

4. I shall here subjoin such Helps and Directions, as may, through God's Blessing, in the faithful use of them, assist and facilitate this great and difficult Work.

First Help.

And first, *Labour to work into your Hearts a deep and fixed Sense of the infinite Wisdom of God, and your own Folly and Ignorance.* This will make Resignation easy to you ; Whatsoever the Lord doth is by Counsel, *Eph. I. 11.* his Understanding is infinite, *Psal. 147. 5.* his Thoughts are very deep, *Psal. 92. 5.* but as for Man, yea the wisest among Men, how little doth his Understanding penetrate the Works and Designs of Providence ? And how oft are we forced to retract our rash Opinions, and confess our Mistakes ? acknowledging that if Providence had not seen with better Eyes than ours, and looked farther than we did, we had precipitated our selves into a thousand Mischiefs, which by its Wisdom and Care we have escaped. It's well for us that the *seven Eyes of Providence* are ever awake, and looking out for our good. Now if one Creature can and ought to be guided and governed by another that is more wise and skilful than himself, as the Client by his learned Counsel, the Patient by his skilful Physician, much more should every Creature give up his weak Reason and shallow Understanding to the infinite Wisdom of the Omniscient God.

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Tert.

It's nothing but our Pride and Arrogance, over-valuing our Understandings, that makes Resignation so hard. * Carnal Reason seems to it self a wise Disputant about the Concerns of the Flesh, but how often hath Providence baffled it? The more Humility, the more Resignation.

How few of our Mercies and Comforts have been foreseen by us? Our own Projects have come to nothing, and that which we never thought on, or contrived, hath taken place ; not our choice of the Ground, or Skill in weighing and delivering the *Bowl*, but some unforeseen Providence, like a Rub in the Green, was that which made the Cast.

Second Help.

Deeply consider the Sinfulness and Vanity of torturing your own Thoughts about the Issues of doubtful Providences.

(1.) There is much Sin in so doing : For all our anxious and solicitous Emotions, what are they other than the immediate Issues and Fruits of Pride and Unbelief? There is not a greater discovery of Pride in the World, than in the Contests of our Wills with the Will of God. It's a presumptuous invading of God's Prerogative, to dictate to his Providence, and prescribe to his Wisdom.

(2.) There is a great deal of Vanity in it : All the Thoughtfulness in the World will not make one Hair white or black: All our Discontents will not prevail with God to call back (or as the Word may be rendered) make void his Word, *Isa. 31. 2.* He is in one Mind, *Job 23. 13.* The Thoughts of his Mind are from Everlasting, *Psalms 33. 11.*

Third Help.

Set before you those choice Scripture Patterns of
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Submission to the Lord's Will in as deep, yea, much deeper Points of Self-denial than this before you, and shame your selves out of this quarrelling Temper with Providence.

You know what a close Trial that Providence was to *Abraham*, that called him from his Native Countrey and Father's House, to go he knew not whither; and yet it's said in *Isa. 41. 2.* He came to God's Foot, as readily obeying his Call, as a Servant when his Master knocks for him with his Foot.

Paul's Voyage to Jerusalem had a dismal Aspect upon himself, he could expect nothing but Bonds and Prisons, as he tells us, *Acts 20. 23.* And a great Trial it was to the *Saints*, who could not tell how to give up such a *Minister*, yet he resigns up his Will to God, *Acts 20. 22.* and so do they, *Acts 21. 14. The Will of the Lord be done.*

But far beyond these, and all other Patterns, what an Example hath our dear *Lord Jesus* set before us in the deepest Point of Self-denial that ever was in the World. When the Father gave the Cup of Sufferings into his Hands in the Garden, *Mark 14. 36.* A Cup of Wrath, the Wrath of the great and terrible God, and that without Mixture: The very Taste whereof, put Nature into an Agony and Astonishment, a sore Amazement, a bloody Sweat; and forced from him that vehement and sad cry, *Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass;* yet still with Submission, *nevertheless not my Will, but thine be done.* O blessed Pattern of Obedience, and Resignation to the Pleasure of God! What is your Case to this?

Fourth Help.

Study the singular Benefits and Advantages of a Will resigned up, and melted into the Will of God.

(1.) Such

(1.) Such a Spirit hath a continual Sabbath within it self: The Thoughts are established, *Prov. 16. 3.* And truly, till a Man come to this, he doth but too much resemble the Devil, who is a restless Spirit, seeking rest, but finding none.

It was an excellent Expression of Luther, to one that was much perplexed in his Spirit about the doubtful Events of some Affairs of his that were then depending: *Dominus tua omnia faciat, & tu nihil facias, sed sis Sabbatum Christi: (i. e.)* The Lord shall do all for thee, and thou shalt do nothing, but be the Sabbath of Christ. It is by this means that the Lord gives his Beloved sleep, *Psalms 127. 2.* He means not the Sleep of the Body, but of the Spirit. *Fideles* (saith one upon that Place) *et si vitam agant laboriosam, compositis tamen & tranquillis animis in fidei silentio se continent, ac si dormirent: (i. e.)* Though Believers live in the midst of many Troubles here, yet with quiet and composed Minds they keep themselves in the Silence of Faith, as though they were asleep.

(2.) Besides, it fits a Man's Spirit for Communion with God in all his Afflictions, and this alleviates and sweetens them beyond any thing in the World.

(3.) And surely a Man is never nearer the Mercy he desires, or the Deliverance he expects, (as one truly observes) than when his Soul is brought into a submissive Temper. David was never nearer the Kingdom, than when he became as a weaned Child.

Fifth Help.

Lastly, Think how repugnant an unsubmissive Temper is both to your Prayers and Professions.

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You pray that the Will of God may be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven, and yet when it seems to cross your Wills or Interests, you struggle and fret against it. You profess to have committed your Souls to his keeping, and to leave your Eternal Concerns in his Hands; and yet cannot commit things infinitely less valuable unto him. How contradictory are these Things!

Your Profession, as Christians, speaks you to be led by the Spirit, but this Practice speaks you to follow the perverse Counsels of your own Spirits. O then regret no more, dispute no more, but lie down meekly at your Father's Feet, and say in all Cases and at all Times, *the Will of the Lord be done.*

And thus I have, through the Aid of Providence, performed what I designed to speak from this Scripture. I acknowledge, my Performances have been accompanied with much Weakness, yet have endeavoured to speak of Providence the Things that are right. Blessed be the Lord, who hath thus far assisted and protected me in this Work.

How Providence will dispose of my Life, Liberty and Labours for Time to come, I know not, but I cheerfully commit all to him, who hath hitherto performed all things for me.

R

POST-

POST-SCRIPT.

IN Consideration of the great and manifold Advantages resulting from an humble and Headful Observation of Providence, I cannot but judge it the Concernment of Christians that have Time and Ability for such a Work, to keep written Memorials, or *Journals* of Providences by them; for their own and others Use and Benefit. For want of collecting and communicating such Observations, not only our selves, but the Church of God is damnified and impoverished.

Some say, the Art of *Medicine* was thus acquired and perfected: When any one had met with some rare *Physical Herb*, and accidentally discovered the Virtues of it, he would post it up in some publick Place; and so the *Physician* attained his Skill, by a Collection of those posted Experiments and Receipts.

I am not for posting up all that a Christian knows or meets with in his Experience, for (as I have said before) *Non est religio, ubi omnia patent*. Religion doth not lay all open; but yet there is a prudent, humble and seasonable Communication of our Experiences and Observations of Providence, which is exceeding beneficial both to our selves and our Brethren.

If Christians in reading the Scriptures, would judiciously collect and record the Providences they shall meet with there, and (if destitute

tute of other Helps) but add those that have fallen out in their own Time and Experience; O what a precious Treasure would these make? How would it antidote their Souls against the spreading Atheism of these Days, and satisfy them, beyond what many other Arguments can do, that *the Lord he is God, the Lord he is God.*

Whilst this Work was under my hand, I was both delighted and assisted by a pious and useful *Essay* of an unknown Author, who hath to very good Purpose improved many Scriptural Passages of Providence, which seem to lie out of the road of common Observation: Some Passages I have noted out of it, which have been sweet to me. And O that Christians would every where set themselves to such Work! Providence carries our Lives, Liberties and Concernments in its hand every Moment. Your Bread is in its Cupboard, your Money in its Purse, your Safety in its enfolding Arms; and sure it is the least Part of what you owe, to record the Favours you receive at his Hands. More particularly,

(1.) Trust not your slippery Memories with such a multitude of remarkable Passages of Providence as you have, and shall meet with in your way to Heaven. It's true, things that greatly affect us, are not easily forgotten by us; and yet, how ordinary is it for new Impressions to raze out former ones? It was a saying of that worthy Man *Dr. Harris*, My Memory (said he) never failed me in all my Life; for indeed, I durst never trust it. Written Memorials secure us against that Hazard; and besides, makes them useful to others when we are gone. So that you carry not away all your Treasure to Heaven with you, but leave these choice Legacies to your surviving

Friends. Certainly it were not so great a Loss, to lose your Silver, your Goods and Chattels, as it is to lose your Experiences which God hath this way given you in this World.

(2.) Take heed of clasping up those rich Treasures in a Book, and thinking it enough to have noted them there: But have frequent recourse to them, as oft as new Wants, Fears or Difficulties arise, and assault you. Now, it's seasonable to consider and reflect, Was I never so distressed before? Is this the first Plunge that ever besel me? *Let me consider the Days of Old, the Years of Ancient Times, as Asaph did, Psalm 77. 5.*

(3.) Lastly, Beware of slighting former Straits and Dangers in comparison with present ones. That which is next us, always appears greatest to us: And as Time removes us farther and farther from our former Mercies or Dangers, so they lessen in our Eyes, just as the Land from which they sail, doth to *Sea-men*. Know that your Dangers have been as great, and your Fears no less formerly than now. Make it as much your Business, to preserve the Sense and Value, as the Memory of former Providences, and the Fruit will be sweet to you.



F I N I S.

The TABLE.

A.

A Buse of Scriptures punished by Providence,	Page 26
Abuse of Providence cautioned,	89, 90
Afflictions preventive of Sin,	90
Afflictions Restraints from Sin,	91
Afflictions, how they purge Corruption,	94, 95
Adherence to Creatures checked,	108
Affections must suit Providence,	133
Afflictive Providences when sanctified,	178
Ambrose his Providential Relief,	87
Andreas how called to the Ministry,	75
Anticipations by Religion advantageous,	44
Assiduity of Providential Care,	80
Aspects of Providence contrary,	187
Association of natural Causes,	17
Atheism checked by Providence,	169
Augustin's strange Deliverance,	22
Augustin's converting a Manichee,	59

B.

B Arbarous Nations their sad State,	38
Bible providentially mistaken,	58
Body its Elegant Structure,	32, 33
Bolton's Conversion,	57
Brethren their different Tempers,	180
Bruen's happy Marriage,	58

C.

C Allings ordered by Providence,	72, 73
Callings sinful in themselves,	74

Callings poor, some Mens Advantage,	76
Cautions about Civil Callings,	78
Care of God to be eyed in Providence,	135
Christ hath his Hand six Ways in Providence,	173
Children settled providentially in Callings,	75
Childrens Duties pressed,	52
Communion with God in Providences. Rules for it, and the Sweetness of it,	153
Committing to God quieting to us,	131
Complaints of painful Callings answered,	76
Comparing Providences how melting,	178
Condescensions of God admirable,	110, 111, 112
Conversion two Ways,	55
Conversion endears Places and Instruments,	53
Conversion, how great a Mercy,	69, 70
Content under all Providences,	142
Crying to God, what it imports,	3, 4
Craft sinful providentially defeated,	126

D.

D Angers in Extremity,	3
Dangers of Death providentially prevented,	97
Dependance on Creatures checked by Providence,	106
Delays of Providence relieved,	139, 140
Delays sink our Hearts,	210, 211
Devil	

The T A B L E.

Devil busie with dying Christians, 191
 Diana's Shrines, what they were, 73, 74
 Distrust not God in new Difficulties, 198
 God's strange Impulse, 92
 Duty to advert Providence, 115
 Dying Hour sweetned by Providence, 191

E.

E Vennels of Spirit, how attained, 228
 Embryoes, their Condition, 35
 Encouragements to wait on God, 212, 213
 England's Encomium, 37, 38
 Epicureans, why they denied Providence, 13
 Expectation from Creatures dashed, 108, 109
 Eye, how guarded by Nature, 97

F.

F aculties sound, a choice Providence, 34
 Faithfulness of God eyed in Providence, 136
 Faith two signal Acts of it, 192
 Families providentially assigned us, 45
 Foresight of Troubles how taken, 239
 Fox his wonderful Relief, 86, 87

G.

G od leaves not his in Straits, 130
 God to be owned in all Providences, 196
 Good Men's Affections over-heated, 108
 Greatness of God discovered, 110, 111

H.

H armony of conjugal Affections Providential, 81

Harmony of God's Attributes, 155
 Heavenly-mindedness in all Providences, 141
 Heart bow melted by Providence, 178
 Heart ballanced under Prosperity, 231
 Heart cheared under sad Providences, 232
 Heart quieted in doubtful Providences, 234
 Heart not under our Command, 236
 Henry the Second punished by Providence, 26
 Holiness improved by eying Providence, 187

I.

I diots the Design of Providence in them, 34, 35
 Idle Life a sinful Life, 73
 Jewel's strange Preservation, 98
 Interpositions of Providence seasonable, 92
 Inobservance of Providence sinful, 117
 Introductive Providences remarkable, 121
 Instruments of Providence to be noted, ibid.
 Immutability of God in changeable Providences, 137
 Joy in God under all Providences, 139

K.

Interest how best secured, 132
 Junius his Conversion how effected, 57
K eepers converted by their Prisoners, 60

L.

L iberality the best Frugality, 132
M arriages the Appointments of Providence, 81

Mi-

The T A B L E.

Ministers Removes ordered by Providence, 62
Mortification promoted by Providence, 101

N.

Natural Causes suspended by Providence, 15, 16
Naaman's Change how effected, 56
Nativity, its Place providentially ordered, 38, 39
Neighbourly Visits improved by Providence, 60
Notes of Attention why affix'd to Providence, 115

O.

Objections of Unbelief solv'd by Providence, 168
Observations of Providence Matter of Praise, 116
Observations of Providence endear Christ, 173
Oecolampadius designed for a Merchant, 75
Obligations to Duty from Providence, 196

P.

Parents godly what a Mercy, 47, 48
Papists their Doom, 39
Parents Advantages opened, 46
Parents suffering from Children, 83
Pareus designed for an Apothecary, 75
Pleasures of a Christian in Providence, 157
Places of sinning Places of Suffering, 25, 26
Pleasing God our Interest, 199
Persecutors baffled by Providence, 21, 22
Pride check'd by Providence, 107, 108
Prayer must preface Business, 198
Prayer furnished by Providence, 118
Prosperity, when sanctified, 227

Prosperity, when unsanctified, 226
Providence working Good out of Evil, 158
Providence pursues the Saints, 159
Providence must follow Scripture, 203
Providence nicks the Opportunity, 28, 29
Providence consonant to Prayer, 30
Providence breaks Egyptian Reeds, 125
Providence fails none that trust it, 123
Provision for us and ours, what a Providence, 85

Q.

Quieting Considerations under sad Providences, 142
Quieting Arguments drawn from Providence, 181

R.

Recognitions of Providence Supports to Faith, 169
Recognitions of Providence must be full, 119
Records to be kept of Providences, 9, 10
Relational Duties pressed, 84
Rebukes of Providence how useful, 188, 189
Reliance on God pleadable in Prayer, 4
Relations ordered by Providence, 80, 81
Resurrection of Prayers pleasant to observe, 157
Retributions of Providence very signal, 25, 26
Relinquishment to God our Duty, 233
Resignation facilitated five Ways, 234, 235
Rochel providentially relieved, 29
Rules to discover the Will of God, 205, 206

The TABLE.

S.	S amaritans Conversion how wrought,	56
	Satan's Malice over-rul'd by Providence,	64
	Sanctification of Providence how discern'd,	124
	Scorning at Purity punished by Providence,	25, 26
	Scope of Providence very considerable,	120
	Seasonable Provisions of Providence,	85, 87
	Seamens admirable Preservation,	97, 98
	Self-denial no Damage,	127
	A Shepherd's pious Observation of Providence,	33, 34
	Spanish Soldiers, how converted,	57
	Soul, its excellent Nature,	34
	Season set for Mercy twofold,	218
	Springs and Autumns of Providence,	179
	Servant's running from his Master improv'd,	61
	Spiritual Mercies of two sorts,	213

T.	T artars and Turks, their sad State,	40
	Dr. Tate's strange Experience of Providence,	30
	Temptations prevented by Providence,	88
	Temptations narrowly escaped,	93, 94
	Tenderness of Providence to the Saints,	171
	Thanksgiving includes five Things in it,	170
	Tranquillity promoted by cying Providence,	181
	Trusting God before Tryal Noble Faith,	173

V.	V alue of Providence in diverse things,	119
	Venice-Glass, how used by Providence,	69
	Vergerius's strange Conversion,	58
	Views of Providence two-fold,	9, 10, 11, 12
	Vileness of Man discovered,	106, 107
	Vicissitudes of Providence disorder Thoughts,	230
	Unequal Marriages, what a Misery,	82, 83
	Ungodly Parents, their Sin and Misery,	43
	Unwillingness of good Men to surrender their Comforts at the Call of Providence,	242

W.	W ales, a strange Conversion there,	57, 58
	Wars, how Providence preserves in them,	97
	Waiting on God prest by ten Arguments,	211
	Weak Means succeeded by Providence,	21
	Will of God, how distinguish'd,	201
	Will of God, how reveal'd,	ibid.
	All Winds serve Providence,	160
	Wicked Men, how quieted under Crosses,	142
	Wisdom of God to be eyed in Providence,	133
	Word of God the best Support in Trouble,	134
	Word of God fulfilled by Providence,	123
	Wisdom of providential Appointments,	88

Y.	Y outh, Providences then received, greatly to be admired,	173
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erfe
119
ovi-
69
58
old,
12
06,
107
der
230
ife-
83
and
43
fur-
Call
42
ion
58
s in
97
nu-
11
ovi-
21
lot
bid.
60
der
42
Pro-
133
in
134
vi-
123
int-
88
re-
red,
173